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Prefatory Note

FOUR of the studies contained in this volume are now offered to the public in a revised form. The other two, those on "Othello" and "The Merry Wives of Windsor," are entirely new. The work, like its predecessor, "Shakespeare Studied in Eight Plays," is intended for the general reader rather than the Shakespearian scholar.

A. S. G. CANNING.

LONDON, *July*, 1906.

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I

OTHELLO, THE MOOR OF VENICE

Lord Macaulay writes enthusiastically of this famous tragedy: "'Othello' is perhaps the greatest work in the world."¹ It has certainly been often mentioned as one of the ablest tragedies ever written, though it is, of course, a matter of opinion if it surpasses, or even equals, "King Lear" either in pathos or in profound knowledge of character. It is, however, only by a careful examination of its different personages that its merits as a sketch of life and character can be fairly compared to those of others. Othello himself appears as a Moorish officer, though a Christian and engaged in the service of the Venetians, who, while not warring with the Mohammedans of Morocco, Othello's fellow-countrymen, were often at war with the Turks, the only other Mohammedan nation which ever invaded Europe. Othello's baptism is only once mentioned (Act II., Scene 3), and where it took place, at what age, or under what circumstances, is not told. This

¹ "Criticisms on the Principal Italian Writers," *Miscellaneous Writings*, vol. i.

play at the first describes him commanding, or aspiring to command, the Venetians against the Turks, or Ottomans, as the poet sometimes terms them. Othello now stands deservedly high in the trust and confidence of the Venetian Senate. The Doge, or Duke, its supreme ruler, takes little part; like the Doge in the "Merchant of Venice," he seems little more than a figure-head, though each nominally is at the head of affairs.

In both of these plays little, if any, allusion is made to Italian scenery or local customs. Othello is beloved by Desdemona, the daughter and only child of an aged Venetian Senator, Brabantio, likewise highly esteemed by the Venetian Government. Desdemona has, before this play commences, refused the hand of Roderigo, a young Venetian gentleman, and, unknown to her father, elopes with Othello at night and secretly marries him. Where this secret marriage took place, or who were present at it, are never stated, but Desdemona evidently knew, or believed, that her father would never consent to her marrying Othello. Yet why Brabantio should so vehemently disapprove her marrying one of the chief officers in the Venetian State, who was generally respected and trusted, appears to be only owing to Othello's Moorish origin.

In Othello's case, Shakespeare makes the singular mistake of describing the Moor as a negro, "black" and "thick-lipped." Few, if any, Moors are thoroughly black, though usually of dark complexion, while they are never thick-lipped, and often have fine features.

Othello, however, is evidently meant to have no personal attraction, but owing to his valour, ability, and loyal devotion to Venice, was often Brabantio's welcome and honoured guest, though considered by the proud old Venetian quite inadmissible as a son-in-law. Othello, who has no Moorish friend or follower, is a thorough Venetian in his feelings and actions, and is attended chiefly by two Italian officers of almost opposite characters, Iago and Cassio. The former, though the most intimate with Othello, has yet been superseded by Cassio, who is appointed the Moor's Lieutenant, while Iago remains as Othello's “ancient” or ensign, and more in his private confidence than Cassio either is, or apparently desires to be.

The first scene begins with Iago and Desdemona's rejected lover, Roderigo, appearing before her father's window at night in Venice. They resolve to tell Brabantio of his daughter's elopement, which has just taken place, and of which they have heard, probably through Othello never keeping any secret from his trusted follower, Iago. Roderigo, who, like most others throughout this play, is for a time quite duped by Iago, foolishly reproaches him, being no match for the other's terrible powers of deceit, exclaiming—

“Tush, never tell me ; I take it much unkindly
That thou, Iago, who hast had my purse
As if the strings were thine, shouldst know of this.”

He apparently means that, though often paying Iago for supposed efforts in his behalf with Desdemona,

Iago knew all the time of her love for his patron Othello. Iago, utterly despising his poor dupe, Roderigo, yet wishing to appear his friend for the present, replies with suppressed contempt :

“ ‘Sblood, but you’ll not hear me :
If ever I did dream of such a matter,
Abhor me ” ;

and poor Roderigo replies :

“ Thou told me thou didst hold him in thy hate.”

Iago replies, stating, with some but not the whole truth, his reason for secretly hating his chief Othello :

“ Despise me, if I do not. Three great ones of the city
In personal suit to make me his lieutenant,
Off-capp’d to him—and, by the faith of man,
I know my price, I am worth no worse a place.”

Then, his anger rising at recalling the rejection of his suit, Iago, with bitter sarcasm, ridicules, and probably imitates or exaggerates, the alleged arrogant haughtiness of Othello :

“ But he, as loving his own pride and purposes,
Evades them with a bombast circumstance
Horribly stuff’d with epithets of war ;
And, in conclusion,
Nonsuits my mediators ; for, ‘ Certes,’ says he,
‘ *I have already chose my officer.*’
And what was he ? ”

and the disappointed officer contemptuously adds, comparing Cassio with himself :

“Forsooth, a great arithmetician,
One Michael Cassio, a Florentine,

That never set a squadron in the field,
Nor the division of a battle ¹ knows
More than a spinster . . .

. . . mere prattle without practice,
Is all his soldiership. But he, sir, had the election.”

Then he proudly adds, comparing his own experience and exploits, known to Othello, to Cassio’s peaceful habits :

“And I—of whom his eyes had seen the proof
At Rhodes, at Cyprus, and on other grounds,
Christian and heathen—must be be-lee’d and calm’d
By debtor and creditor : this counter-caster,
He, in good time, must his lieutenant be,
And I (bless the mark) his Moorship’s ancient !”

The scorn with which he mentions his chief and the quiet habits of his successful rival seems to rouse Roderigo, who impetuously exclaims :

“By heaven, I rather would have been his hangman.”

Iago, cautious, practical, yet confidential or unguarded with Roderigo, owing partly to his contempt for him, rejoins :

“Why, there’s no remedy ; ‘tis the curse of service,
Preferment goes by letter and affection,
And not by old gradation, where each second
Stood heir to the first. Now, sir, be judge yourself,
Whether I in any just term am affined ²
To love the Moor.”

¹ “Army.”—Staunton’s notes.

² “Bound.”—Ibid.

This abrupt question, cautiously revealing something of Iago's selfish, vindictive mind, elicits a brief, dignified reply from Roderigo—who, despite his dejection at Desdemona's refusal of him, always preserves an honourable feeling throughout, of which Iago is, of course, incapable—and he answers :

“I would not follow him then.”

Iago again, to some extent, opens his deceitful mind to poor, sad Roderigo, of whom he makes a complete dupe indeed, yet never inspires with his own baseness. He thus describes not only his treachery, but the result of his keen, yet, happily, by no means always accurate, observation on the mutual conduct of masters and servants :

“O, sir, content you ;
 I follow him to serve my turn upon him :
 We cannot all be masters, nor all masters
 Cannot be truly follow'd. You shall mark
 Many a duteous and knee-crooking knave,¹
 That, doting on his own obsequious² bondage,
 Wears out his time, much like his master's ass,
 For nought but provender ; and when he's old, cashier'd :
 Whip me such honest knaves. Others there are
 Who, trimm'd in forms and visages of duty,
 Keep yet their hearts attending on themselves,
 And, throwing but shows of service on their lords,
 Do well, thrive by them, and when they have lin'd their
 coats,
 Do themselves homage : these fellows have some soul,

¹ “No opprobrious meaning here ; it is simply ‘servitor.’”—Staunton's notes.

² “Obedient.”—Ibid.

And such a one I do profess myself. For, sir,
It is as sure as you are Roderigo,
Were I the Moor, I would not be Iago :
In following him, I follow but myself ;
Heaven is my judge, not I for love and duty,
But seeming so, for my peculiar end.”

He then frankly boasts of his own rare power of deceit, by which such open, unsuspecting men as his two victims, Othello and Roderigo, are alike easily deceived:

“ For when my outward action doth demonstrate
The native act and figure of my heart
In compliment extern, 'tis not long after
But I will wear my heart upon my sleeve
For daws to peck at : I am not what I am.”

Roderigo, his grieved mind absorbed by Desdemona's refusing him and by her elopement with Othello, makes no reply to Iago's last words, and, confounding his black, or rather dark, rival with a negro, he exclaims, astounded yet envious at Desdemona's love for him :

“ What a full fortune does the thick-lips owe,
If he can carry 't thus.”

Iago, recalled from his brief description of masters and servants generally, and knowing Roderigo's acquaintance with Brabantio, exclaims, probably according to a previous plan of action :

“ Call up her father,
Rouse him : make after him, poison his delight,
Proclaim him in the streets ; incense her kinsmen.”

He apparently knows that Desdemona's relatives would be enraged at her marriage, but while wishing them informed of it, resolves to keep himself in the background and make Roderigo run the chief risk of his dangerous communication. Accordingly, when Roderigo exclaims :

“Here is her father's house ; I'll call aloud,”

Iago replies, telling him how to spread the news :

“Do, with like timorous accent and dire yell
As when (by night and negligence) the fire
Is spied in populous cities.”

Roderigo, thus instructed, for the present following all Iago's advice, shouts loudly :

“What ho ! Brabantio ! Signor Brabantio, ho !”

and Iago adds :

“Awake ! what ho ! Brabantio ! thieves ! thieves !
Look to your house, your daughter, and your bags !
Thieves ! thieves !”

Brabantio, aroused, appears at a window. He at first does not recognise Roderigo, but when he does, he exclaims frankly :

“I have charged thee not to haunt about my doors ;
In honest plainness thou hast heard me say
My daughter is not for thee, and now in madness
(Being full of supper and distempering draughts),
Upon malicious bravery, dost thou come
To start my quiet.”

Roderigo, grieved at such reproaches and by what he has to tell, replies in evident confusion :

“Sir, sir, sir ;”

and the hot-tempered Brabantio, at first mistaking his hesitation for guilty confusion, proceeds sternly,

“But thou must needs be sure,
My spirit and my place have in them power
To make this bitter to thee.”

Brabantio seeming slow to believe the news, Iago, with scornful impatience, exclaims :

“Zounds, sir, you are one of those who will not serve God if the devil bid you.”

Brabantio exclaims, certainly with truth :

“Thou art a villain,”

and Iago, in evident sarcasm and likely in a provoking manner, retorts :

“You are a senator.”

Brabantio sternly rejoins, mindful of his own high position in the State :

“This thou shalt answer.”

Then, as if rather relenting to the more respectful Roderigo, he says, as if encouraging him to speak :

“I know thee, Roderigo,”

and awaits his news.

Roderigo then eagerly assures him of his daughter's flight with Othello. Brabantio, though shocked and irritated at Iago's insolent language, yet is inclined to believe Roderigo, and after hearing him exclaims, now really apprehensive of the truth :

“ Strike on the tinder, ho !
Give me a taper—call up all my people !
This accident is not unlike my dream :
Belief of it oppresses me already.
Light, I say, light !”

So saying, Brabantio withdraws with his attendants, when Iago, alone with Roderigo, reveals some of his plans and feelings :

“ Farewell, for I must leave you :
It seems not meet, nor wholesome to my place
To be produc'd (as if I stay I shall)
Against the Moor.”

He then owns the high esteem in which Othello is held in Venice and the importance of his position, while admitting that his marriage will be disapproved of by the Venetians.

“ For I do know the State,
However this may gall him with some check,
Cannot with safety cast him, for he's embark'd
With such loud reason to the Cyprus wars,

.
Another of his fathom they have none,
To lead their business : in which regard
Though I do hate him as I do hell-pains,
Yet, for necessity of present life,
I must show out a flag and sign of love,
Which is indeed but sign.”

Then, addressing Roderigo :

“That you shall surely find him,
Lead to the Sagittary¹ the raised search ;
And there will I be with him. So farewell.”

Iago departs, and Brabantio, re-appearing after his vain search through his house, addresses Roderigo. The grieved father is as much enraged and shocked at the elopement of his daughter with Othello as if she had committed some heinous crime. His shame and indignation seem rather unreasonable, considering the Moor’s high position in the Venetian service and the general respect in which he is held; moreover, Othello had been his own honoured guest hitherto. Yet nothing now can reconcile Brabantio to the marriage. Had Desdemona eloped with a bigoted Mohammedan instead of an illustrious leader of a Christian army he could scarcely be more annoyed and horrified. He exclaims, like a broken-hearted man, almost distracted, to the sympathetic Roderigo :

“It is too true an evil : gone she is !
And what’s to come of my despised time
Is nought but bitterness. Now, Roderigo,
Where didst thou see her ? O unhappy girl !
With the Moor, sayst thou ? Who would be a father ?
How didst thou know ‘twas she ? O she deceives me
Past thought ! . . .
. . . Are they married, think you ?”

¹ “The residence at the arsenal of the commanding officers of the army and navy of the Republic.”—Mr. Knight’s opinion, quoted in Staunton’s comments.

Roderigo replies, though apparently not certain :

“Truly, I think they are.”

Brabantio, hardly able apparently to yet realise what has happened, exclaims :

“O heaven ! How got she out ?”

Without awaiting answer, he proceeds, astounded at what he thinks his daughter's deceit :

“O treason of the blood !
Fathers, from hence trust not your daughters' minds
By what you see them act.”

Then a strange superstitious fancy occurs to him, which perhaps at the moment may be a kind of relief, and he asks Roderigo, who is as grieved, though not as distracted, as himself :

“Are there not charms
By which the property of youth and maidhood
May be abused ? Have you not read, Roderigo,
Of some such thing ?”

Roderigo, who perhaps believes something of the kind, sadly answers :

“Yes, sir, I have indeed.”

Brabantio, having this idea firmly in his mind, rouses all his energies for immediate pursuit of the fugitives, exclaiming :

“Call up my brother !”

Then, kindly addressing Roderigo, and longing to recall the past, he exclaims :

“O would you had had her ! ”

and proceeds, directing his followers,

“Some one way, some another.”

Then asks Roderigo :

“Do you know
Where we may apprehend her and the Moor ? ”

Roderigo replies, not without some alarm for the safety of the pursuers :

“I think I can discover him, if you please
To get good guard and come along with me”;

and Brabantio, completely trusting him, exclaims :

“Pray you, lead on. At every house I'll call :
I may command at most. Get weapons, ho !
And raise some special officers of night.
On, good Roderigo ; I'll deserve your pains.”

The next scene is in a street of Venice at night, where Othello and Iago are together, with attendants and torches, but they are likely not near enough to their chief to hear his talk with his trusted adviser. Iago alludes either to Brabantio or to Roderigo as having provoked him by abusing Othello, but he had restrained his anger, and Othello, approving this self-control, calmly says :

“ ‘Tis better as it is,”

when Iago asks him if he is really married, declaring that Brabantio has great influence in Venice, and will either procure a divorce or do him some injury. But Othello, knowing how highly he is esteemed now in Venice, owing to his past military exploits, confidently replies :

"Let him do his spite ;
My services which I have done the signiory
Shall out-tongue his complaints.

.
I fetch my life and being
From men of royal siege."

He thus briefly alludes to his royal ancestry, but never does so again. He probably referred to the royal family of Morocco, but, since his leading Christian forces against Mohammedans, could have had no more intercourse with them. He now perceives people with lights approaching, and Iago advises him to retire, thinking they may be Brabantio and his friends, but Cassio, at present Othello's chief officer, enters with important news. The Turks are now at open war with the Venetians, who were often at enmity, and Othello, Cassio says, is requested by the Venetian Senate to attend at the Duke's house immediately. Othello goes into some house, saying he will rejoin them soon ; and then Iago informs Cassio of Othello's secret marriage, but does not say to whom. It is evident from this that Iago enjoys Othello's confidence the most, as no one but he seems to know of the latter's secret marriage.

Othello returns to them, and at this moment Brabantio, Roderigo and their followers appear on the

scene. Iago pretends to challenge his poor dupe Roderigo, as if befriending Othello, and swords are drawn on both sides, when the Moor calmly addresses friends and foes alike, exclaiming with fearless dignity :

“Keep up your bright swords, for the dew will rust them.”

Then respectfully addresses Brabantio :

“Good signor, you shall more command with years
Than with your weapons.”

Brabantio, perhaps the more enraged at his coolness, and still believing he has really bewitched his daughter furiously asks :

“O thou foul thief, where hast thou stowed my daughter ?
Damned as thou art, thou hast enchanted her ;
For I'll refer me to all things of sense,
If she in chains of magic were not bound,
Whether a maid so tender, fair and happy,
So opposite to marriage that she shunn'd”

(here he probably alludes to the rejected Roderigo)

“The wealthy curled ¹ darlings of our nation
Would ever have, to incur a general mock,
Run from her guardage to the sooty bosom
Of such a thing as thou—to fear, not to delight.”

He then makes a vehement, passionate appeal to all around, as if to people in power, though now only his foes and followers hear him :

“Judge me the world, if 'tis not gross in sense
That thou hast practis'd on her with foul charms,
Abus'd her delicate youth with drugs or minerals
That waken motion.”

¹ “Curled was an epithet characteristic of gentility.”—Staunton's notes.

He thus persists in his idea that Desdemona has been enchanted or bewitched when she eloped with Othello, and threatens to bring forward a public trial of the case. Yet his audience, except followers on both sides, now alone comprise the rejected "curled darling," Roderigo, and Othello, the suspected evil magician, whose dark complexion, Moorish origin and supposed deceit now drive the proud, formal, and prejudiced old Venetian Senator almost beyond the verge of reason. Had Othello been an infamous criminal instead of a distinguished, trusted officer, the vehement enmity of his father-in-law could hardly have been more deep or more implacable. Fully impressed with the belief that the Moor is a dangerous magician, he indignantly proceeds :

"I therefore apprehend and do attach thee
For an abuser of the world, a practiser
Of arts inhibited and out of warrant.
Lay hold upon him : if he do resist,
Subdue him at his peril."

There might now have been a dangerous conflict between the opposing followers of the Moor and Brabantio, had not Othello again calmly intervened, saying :

"Hold your hands !
Both you of my inclining and the rest ";

adding, with cool dignity :

"Were it my cue to fight, I should have known it
Without a prompter."

Then, addressing Brabantio :

“ Where will you that I go,
To answer this charge ? ”

Brabantio sternly replies :

“ To prison, ”

when an attendant officer announces that the Duke is now in council, and evidently some pressing State business on hand, about which Othello is summoned, although at night. Brabantio, surprised at this news, asks all around to bring Othello at once before the Duke, to whom he is going himself, and boldly exclaims :

“ Mine’s not an idle cause ; the Duke himself
Or any of my brothers of the State,
Cannot but feel this wrong as ‘twere their own.”

He adds, as if hardly believing in Othello’s being a Christian :

“ For if such actions may have passage free,
Bond-slaves and pagans shall our statesmen be.”

About this period the island of Cyprus was apparently either wholly or partly under Venetian rule, but now menaced by a Turkish attack. While the Duke and some Senators are discussing how to meet this public danger, Othello, Brabantio, Iago and Roderigo appear with attendants before the Duke, who, first seeing the Moor, says :

“ Valiant Othello, we must straight employ you
Against the general enemy Ottoman.”

Then, perceiving Brabantio, he exclaims :

“ I did not see you ; welcome, gentle signor,
We lack’d your counsel and your help to-night.”

Brabantio replies :

“ So did I yours,”

and sadly proceeds :

“ Good your grace, pardon me,
Neither my place, nor aught I heard of business
Hath rais’d me from my bed, nor doth the general care
Take hold on me ; for my particular grief
Is of so flood-gate and o’erbearing nature
That it engluts and swallows other sorrows,
And it is still itself.”

He then accuses Othello openly of having

“ By spells and medicines bought of mountebanks,”

stolen his daughter from him. The Duke, astonished, and likely divided in mind between friendship for Brabantio and admiration for the gallant Moorish general now about to head Venetian troops, asks Othello what he has to say in defence. Then the Moor addresses the Venetian Senate in an eloquent speech, perhaps better known, or more admired, than any other passage in this play :

“ Most potent, grave, and reverend signors,
My very noble and approv’d good masters,
That I have ta’en away this old man’s daughter
It is most true ; true, I have married her :
The very head and front of my offending
Hath this extent, no more.”

He proceeds after this avowal in a manly, frank manner, which probably impressed all the Senators except Brabantio in his favour :

“ Rude am I in my speech,
And little blessed with the soft phrase of peace,
For since these arms of mine had seven years' pith
Till now some nine moons wasted, they have us'd
Their dearest action in the tented field,
And little of this great world can I speak,
More than pertains to feats of broils and battle,
And therefore little shall I grace my cause
In speaking for myself. Yet, by your gracious patience,
I will a round unvarnish'd tale deliver
Of my whole course of love.”

He then, utterly scorning, almost in sarcasm, the idea that he had used magic or evil charms, and evidently grieved or irritated at such an accusation, proceeds :

“ What drugs, what charms,
What conjuration, and what mighty magic,
For such proceeding am I charged withal,
I won his daughter.”

Brabantio, firmly impressed with his original idea, is evidently quite unmoved by Othello's words. His prejudice against Othello's nationality and appearance now completely overcomes all the esteem which he, in common with other Venetians, has hitherto felt for the Moorish general. He is yet more incensed or astounded, if possible, at what he considers Desdemona's deceit towards himself, apparently her only parent. Distrusting therefore, or perhaps hardly understanding all Othello's words, the afflicted father again reverts to his child in pathetic language, evidently hardly able

to abandon his fond idea, if not hope, that she has been drugged or bewitched by Othello's secret arts, and he perhaps thinks that, if so, she may yet be recovered or restored to her right senses. Without noticing Othello's declaration, he recalls to his distressed and excited mind his daughter's peculiar disposition and character, exclaiming :

“A maiden never bold,
Of spirit so still and quiet, that her motion
Blush'd at herself, and she—in spite of nature,
Of years, of country, credit, everything—
To fall in love with what she fear'd to look on !
It is a judgment maim'd and most imperfect.

... I therefore vouch again
That with some mixture powerful o'er the blood,
Or with some dram conjured to this effect,
He wrought upon her.”

The Duke, who likely thinks that such baseness is altogether inconsistent with Othello's character, and probably unwilling to in any way punish or degrade a distinguished officer so useful to the Venetian State, replies with calm truth :

“To vouch this is no proof,
Without more wider and more overt test.”

A Senator here asks Othello a direct question how he obtained Desdemona's love, to which the Moor replies by asking that she should be sent for to state her case before the assembled Senators. Othello then bids Iago to conduct her to their presence, adding significantly :

“You best know the place,”

for evidently Iago is more in Othello's confidence than any one. When Iago is gone for this purpose, Othello takes the opportunity to relate, by the Duke's leave, how he obtained Desdemona's love, saying in moving words :

“ Her father lov'd me ; oft invited me ;
Still question'd me the story of my life,
From year to year—the battles, sieges, fortunes,
That I have passed.
I ran it through, even from my boyish days,
To the very moment that he bade me tell it ;
Wherein I spake of most disastrous chances,
Of moving accidents by flood and field,
· · · · ·
Of being taken by the insolent foe
And sold to slavery, of my redemption thence.”

Othello proceeds to relate some risks and adventures of his early life, the natural wonders of different lands he had visited, and the various savages he had seen or heard about. Among these he mentions a race that neither ancient history nor modern discovery acknowledges as ever existing for certain, though obscurely hinted at by the ancient and comparatively modern writers, Pliny and Sir Walter Raleigh.¹

“ The Anthropophagi and men whose heads
Do grow beneath their shoulders.”

During his wonderful narrative Othello, like some other travellers, apparently mingled fact and fiction together, either through his own credulity or from wishing to astonish as well as interest his hearers.

¹ Staunton's notes.

He adds, referring to the effect of his narrative on Desdemona :

" This to hear
 Would Desdemona seriously incline :
 But still the house affairs would draw her thence :
 Which ever as she could with haste despatch,
 She would come again, and with a greedy ear
 Devour up my discourse : which I observing,
 Took once a pliant hour and found good means
 To draw from her a prayer of earnest heart.

. . . . My story being done,
 She gave me for my pains a world of sighs :
 She swore, in faith 'twas strange, 'twas passing strange,
 'Twas pitiful, 'twas wondrous pitiful.
 She wish'd she had not heard it, yet she wish'd
 That heaven had made her such a man : she thank'd me,
 And bade me if I had a friend that lov'd her,
 I should but teach him how to tell my story,
 And that would woo her. Upon this hint I spake :
 She lov'd me for the dangers I had pass'd,
 And I lov'd her that she did pity them."

Then, scornfully reverting to Brabantio's charge against him, he concludes:

" This only is the witchcraft I have used.
 Here comes the lady ; let her witness it."

Desdemona enters with Iago and attendants, while the Duke, deeply impressed by Othello's words, besides having high esteem for his past service to Venice, exclaims with sympathetic feeling :

" I think this tale would win my daughter too."

Then, addressing Brabantio, who has remained silent during Othello's speech, but doubtless heard it with

earnest attention, the Duke proceeds to give him advice :

“Good Brabantio,
Take up this mangled matter at the best,”

evidently wishing him to be reconciled to his new son-in-law, and utterly disbelieving in the idea of Othello’s having bewitched Desdemona. Brabantio’s love of truth and frankness has evidently been impressed by Othello’s words, yet he is still too prejudiced and irritated to quite believe them, and firmly replies :

“I pray you, hear her speak :
If she confess that she was half the wooer,
Destruction on my head, if my bad blame
Light on the man !”

He then asks his daughter the important question, on her answer to which depends, indeed, all the happiness of his future life :

“Come hither, gentle mistress :
Do you perceive in all this noble company
Where most you owe obedience ?”

All wait in silence, as so much depends on Desdemona’s reply to this solemn and, in her case, awful question. To the grief and amazement of her father, she answers in the calm style of a rational mind, free from all secret evil influence, but fully determined and resolute :

“My noble father,
I do perceive here a divided duty :
To you I am bound for life and education.

... You are the lord of duty :
 I am hitherto your daughter ; but here's my husband,
 And so much duty as my mother show'd
 To you, preferring you before her father,
 So much I challenge that I may profess
 Due to the Moor my lord."

These words convince Brabantio for the first time that his daughter has left him of her own free will. He now knows that Desdemona, apparently convinced that he would never have consented to her wishes, had therefore secretly married Othello, who, though friendly with him, had never even hinted about his love for Desdemona. Overcome, amazed and shocked by Desdemona's free admission of her thoughts and acts, Brabantio exclaims, evidently from his heart, as he now abandons her for ever, and believes that she has ungratefully abandoned him :

"God be with you !—I have done."

Then, as if trying to suppress his private grief in turning to his country's welfare, he proceeds, addressing the Duke for the moment :

"Please it your grace, on to the State affairs " ;

and at once reverting to his own troubles, he addresses both Othello and his daughter in words of sad and solemn abandonment :

"Come hither, Moor :
 I here do give thee that with all my heart
 Which, but thou hast already, with all my heart
 I would keep from thee. For your sake, jewel,
 I am glad at soul I have no other child ;
 For thy escape would teach me tyranny,
 To hang clogs on them. I have done, my lord."

The Duke recognising much to respect in both Othello and Brabantio, and naturally anxious to reconcile such men, calmly replies to the latter :

“ Let me speak like yourself,¹ and lay a sentence,
Which, as a grise or step, may help these lovers
Into your favour.”

He then proceeds, vainly interceding, and perhaps quoting, in favour of the newly married pair :

“ *When remedies are past, the griefs are ended
By seeing the worst, which late on hopes depended.
To mourn a mischief that is past and gone
Is the next way to draw new mischief on.
What cannot be preserv'd when Fortune takes
Patience her injury a mockery makes.
The robb'd that smiles, steals something from the thief;
He robs himself that spends a bootless grief.*”

This calm, quaint, yet wise advice, in a case which the adviser has nothing to do with, has no effect on the heart-broken Brabantio. He answers it with almost sarcastic bitterness, while vainly trying to turn his afflicted mind from private sorrows to public business. Knowing the Venetian anxiety to preserve Cyprus from the Turks, he aptly, even in the midst of his depression, compares an apprehended political loss to his own private deprivation, and exclaims :

“ So let the Turk of Cyprus us beguile ;
We lose it not, so long as we can smile.
He bears the sentence well, that nothing bears,
But the free comfort, which from thence he hears ,

¹ Mr. Staunton suggests, “ He perhaps means sententiously.”

But he bears both the sentence and the sorrow
That, to pay grief, must of poor patience borrow.

But words are words, I never yet did hear
That the bruised heart was pierced through the ear."

Then, as if unable to endure the subject longer, or unwilling to take up more of the Senate's attention at this important meeting, he adds :

"I humbly beseech you, proceed to the affairs of State."

The Duke, seeing that his words prevail nothing with Brabantio, gives him no more advice, but states that the Turks are preparing to attack Cyprus. The Duke says :

"Othello, the fortitude of the place is best known to you,"

and therefore he, in the name of Venice, requests Othello to go there in command of troops, despite of his recent marriage, saying :

"You must therefore be content to slubber the gloss of your new fortunes with this more stubborn and boisterous expedition."

Othello replies that the trials and hardships of war are delightful to him, but while gladly accepting the trust of leading the Venetian troops against the Turks, he asks where he should leave Desdemona. The Duke suggests at her father's house, but Brabantio refuses consent, and then Desdemona entreats the Senate to permit her accompanying Othello. The Duke says that the Moor must set

off for Cyprus this same evening. Othello agrees, saying he will leave Desdemona under the care of Iago, whom he terms and believes is “a man of honesty and trust,” till she rejoins him in Cyprus.

The Duke agrees, and warmly admiring Othello, whom he would gladly reconcile with Brabantio, says a few impressive words praising Othello to the implacable father-in-law :

“Noble signor,
If virtue no delighted¹ beauty lack
Your son-in-law is far more fair than black.”

A friendly Senator also exclaims :

“Adieu, brave Moor ; use Desdemona well.”

Brabantio, at parting, says the most severe and injurious words he can imagine about her to Othello, words which Iago never forgot, and which he was fated to recall later on with terrible effect :

“Look to her, Moor, if thou hast eyes to see :
She has deceived her father, and may thee.”

The Duke departs after these words without noticing them.

This warning denunciation proves indeed the implacability of Brabantio towards his married daughter, though he little foresaw its fearful effect on her future life. His indignation against Othello, and his suspicion of his having practised occult arts,

¹ “Delighting.”—Staunton’s notes.

completely vanish, while his confidence in Desdemona's innocence or virtue in any respect seems utterly destroyed by what he thinks her ungrateful deceit towards himself. Her conduct in never even hinting to her father about her love for Othello can hardly be quite excused by her believing he would never consent to her marriage. She might surely have tried the effect of some entreaty before eloping at night from his house, hitherto her home, and causing him, at his advanced age, all the danger and distress of such an alarm. In filial duty, and apparently in affection also, she falls far short indeed of Cordelia in "King Lear," and yet apparently had a more kind father than that passionate old monarch was. Cordelia replies to her enraged father, when told, or rather ordered to state, how much she loves him :

"Good my lord,
You have begot me, bred me, loved me : I
Return those duties back as are right fit,
Obey you, love you, and most honour you.

. Haply, when I shall wed,
That lord whose hand must take my plight shall carry
Half my love with him ; half my care, and duty."

These sentiments surely raise Cordelia morally far above Desdemona, eloping in secret from her old father's house at night, and thus letting the event unexpectedly be told him, which shortens his life. She never throughout this tragedy inquires after him, while Cordelia loves her denouncing father to the last, and dies in trying to rescue him.

Othello, at hearing Brabantio's terrible words, eagerly notices them, yet with perfect confidence in his denounced bride, and firmly replies :

“ My life upon her faith ! ”

Then, addressing his trusted follower, yet most bitter enemy, he says :

“ Honest Iago,
My Desdemona must I leave with thee :
I pr'ythee, let thy wife attend on her,
And bring them after in the best advantage.
Come, Desdemona, I have but an hour
Of love, of worldly matter and direction,
To spend with thee : we must obey the time.”

They depart, and probably Brabantio left before with the Duke, leaving Iago and Roderigo alone together. No one hears, or likely even guesses about their extraordinary conference. Roderigo is apparently unacquainted with Othello—at least they never exchange a word. But Iago, knowing all about his rejected love for Desdemona, has obtained his thorough confidence, and has for some time successfully pretended to be his friend.

During the important scene before the Venetian Senate, Iago and Roderigo, though both deeply interested in its result, have remained quite silent, and not till they are alone together do they venture to reveal their feelings. Roderigo, grieved and disconsolate, patiently asks his treacherous friend :

“ What will I do, think'st thou ? ”

and Iago, in reply, advising him to

“Go to bed and sleep,”

Roderigo impetuously, if not frantically, exclaims :

“I will incontinently drown myself.”

This desperate resolve Iago, who intends using him as a profitable instrument for some time longer, sarcastically discourages, replying :

“If thou dost, I shall never love thee after. Why, thou silly gentleman !”

And when poor Roderigo answers :

“It is silliness to live when to live is a torment, and then have we a prescription to die when death is our physician,”

Iago rejoins emphatically :

“O villainous ! I have looked upon the world for four times seven years, and since I could distinguish between a benefit and an injury, I never found man that knew how to love himself.”

Then, determined to encourage Roderigo by persuading him that he may yet win Desdemona, by following his advice, Iago, scornfully alluding to Roderigo’s idea of suicide, calmly proceeds :

“Come, be a man. Drown thyself ! drown cats and blind puppies. I have professed me thy friend. . . . I could never better stead thee than now. Put money in thy purse ; follow thou the wars ; defeat thy favour¹ with an usurped beard ; I say, put money in thy purse.”

¹ “Change thy countenance by putting on a spurious beard.”—Staunton’s notes.

This practical advice Iago often repeats, well knowing how to get it from him, and proceeds, in words well calculated to win over the poor love-sick Roderigo :

“It cannot be that Desdemona should long continue her love to the Moor—put money in thy purse—nor he his to her; it was a violent commencement, and thou shalt see an answerable sequestration—put but money in thy purse. These Moors are changeable in their wills—fill thy purse with money she must change for youth she will find the error of her choice; she must have change, therefore put money in thy purse. If thou wilt needs damn thyself, do it a more delicate way than drowning. Make all the money thou canst: if sanctimony and a frail vow betwixt an erring barbarian and a super-subtle Venetian be not too hard for my wits thou shalt enjoy her; therefore make money. A pox of drowning thyself! it is clean out of the way: seek thou rather to be hanged in compassing thy joy, than to be drowned and go without her.”

This view of his case evidently startles Roderigo, who, catching from it as it were a faint ray of hope, almost imploringly asks :

“Wilt thou be fast to my hopes, if I depend on the issue?”

This question Iago is well prepared for, and, eager to get more and more money from his luckless dupe, artfully replies, though with some hints as to his private feelings :

“Thou art sure of me—go, make money—I have told thee often, and I re-tell thee again and again, I hate the Moor: my cause is hearted; thine hath no less reason; let us be conjunctive in our revenge against him. . . . Traverse! go, provide thy money. We will have more of this to-morrow. Adieu.”

Roderigo eagerly asks :

“Where shall we meet in the morning?”

Iago replies :

“At my lodging.”

Roderigo rejoins :

“I'll be with thee betimes.”

Iago replies :

“Go to ; farewell.”

Then, apparently uneasy lest he should commit suicide, as he had mentioned, Iago calls him back, saying half in scorn, half in earnest :

“No more of drowning, do you hear ?”

To these words the poor dupe makes precisely the answer his tempter desired :

“I am changed. I'll go sell all my land.”

This resolution Iago evidently approves, replying :

“Go to ; farewell ; put but money enough in thy purse.”

Roderigo departs, and then Iago, alone, reveals his dangerous mind and purposes in safe soliloquy. It seems often Shakespeare's practice to make his villains thus explain themselves and to rarely trust any confidant, beyond a very limited point. Iago, especially, unlike King John, Richard III., or Edmund in “King Lear,” has neither friend, adherent, nor lover to aid his secret designs. It is true, indeed, that Richard

declared no one loved him, and that he was “himself alone”; yet these notions proceeded from the depressing fancies of his guilty mind, rather than from real fact, as thousands of brave English subjects were faithful to him at the last and perished in his cause. King John had also faithful adherents, Hubert de Burgh and Falconbridge—far better subjects than he deserved to have; while Edmund had completely won the affections of the royal sisters, the two Princesses Goneril and Regan. But Iago is absolutely and completely alone in his secret plots. Neither his wife, Emilia, his chief, Othello, nor his two dupes, Cassio and Roderigo, has the least idea of his real character or evil plans, which he now ventures to disclose as Roderigo leaves him alone. He begins by exulting over his superior cunning in duping the trustful, unsuspecting Roderigo, and scornfully recalling similar instances of his successful deceit. It may seem strange that a habitual knave, as he admits himself to be, should so completely impose upon so many persons. At the beginning of this play, Iago is liked, esteemed, and trusted by all his acquaintances, and he contemptuously exclaims, referring to Roderigo as he departs:

“Thus do I ever make my fool my purse;
For I mine own gained knowledge should profane,
If I would time expend with such a snipe,
But for my sport and profit.”

In the poet’s time snipe, it is said, were not

uncommon in the neighbourhood of London. Many sportsmen well know how often this bird, when missed, alights again, thus tempting shooters to "expend time" in its pursuit. This fact may explain Iago's comparison, and also prove how true Shakespeare is to natural history, though he seldom alludes to it. Iago proceeds, revealing more and more of his secret mind, which none of his numerous acquaintances seem to understand in the least degree :

"I hate the Moor,"

and mentions an evidently wicked scandal that Othello is a lover of Emilia, his wife, adding words and intentions hardly consistent with his shrewd, observant nature :

"I know not if 't be true ;
But I, for mere suspicion in that kind,
Will do as if for surety."

It seems scarcely worthy of a man so crafty, so worldly and self-controlled, to "do for surety" without full proof in such an important case. A young, impetuous lover might act so, indeed, but the Iago of reality would likely be more deliberate, before devoting all his energies and risking his life to injure a patron and benefactor without absolute certainty of the wrong alleged. A man so worldly-wise as Iago, admitting previously that he had never known a man "who could love himself," would surely in his life's progress have learned to rather distrust, or at least carefully examine, a case of "mere suspicion," instead

of absolutely relying upon it for belief and conduct. Yet, having once this idea firmly in his mind, he proceeds, with the calm malignity of his relentless nature, to avail himself of Othello's confidence, saying :

“He holds me well;
The better shall my purpose work on him.”

This purpose is to rouse Othello's jealousy of Desdemona, as the next sentence reveals :

“Cassio's a proper man: let me see now:
To get his place and to plume up my will
In double knavery—How, how?—Let's see.”

He asks himself this question, and then, as if Mephistopheles whispered in his ear, thoughtfully proceeds to compose and unfold the whole plot of this terrible tragedy.

“After a time to abuse Othello's ear
That he is too familiar with his wife.
He hath a person and a smooth dispose
To be suspected, fram'd to make women false.”

Here he recalls with confidence Othello's noble character, while as resolved as ever to effect his destruction :

“The Moor is of a free and open nature,
That thinks men honest that but seem to be so,
And will as tenderly be led by the nose
As asses are.”

Thus calmly calculating on the personal attractions of Cassio and the trustful simplicity of Othello, Iago naturally thinks that both in mind and body these two

future subjects of his treachery will be as easily victimised as the confiding, weak Roderigo. The whole trio certainly are none of them astute men, and up to this time repose complete confidence in "honest Iago," as he is often termed, who, thus reviewing their separate characters, and with thorough knowledge of each, finally exclaims, as his plot ripens in his secret mind :

"I have 't. It is engender'd. Hell and night
Must bring this monstrous birth to the world's light."

The idea of the ruin of Othello and Cassio now inspires and absorbs Iago's thoughts. Their destruction would be indeed, as he admits, "a double knavery," by which his strange, mistaken hatred of Othello and his bitter contempt for Cassio would be alike gratified. He has now the future fortunes of Othello, Desdemona, Roderigo and Cassio constantly in his malignant mind. None of the four knows his real character, but on the contrary alike believe him the precise opposite of what he is. To them he is sometimes "honest," sometimes "good" Iago; and no one has the least suspicion of him. He therefore calmly and safely examines or reviews their separate characters, positions, and feelings, with a relentless enmity, which would seem hardly natural, considering their friendly esteem for him, yet which the poet describes with such wonderful consistency.

The next act and scene are in Cyprus, where, indeed, all the rest of the tragedy takes place. This

island, according to the play, is now held by the Venetians, but was a frequent cause of strife between them and the Turks, against whom the Moorish general, Othello, is now heading the forces of Venice with all the vigour of an able and faithful commander, and perhaps partly with the zeal of a convert. Montano, the Venetian Governor of Cyprus, is now awaiting the arrival of Othello, who is to be his successor. The latter's officers, Iago and Cassio, escorting Desdemona and Emilia, arrive before him. Cassio, an enthusiastic admirer of female beauty, describes Desdemona to Montano, who inquires if Othello is married. He warmly replies :

“ Most fortunately : he hath achieved a maid
That paragons description and wild fame.

And in the essential vesture of creation
Does tire the ingener.”¹

A gentleman now announces the landing of Iago, and Cassio exclaims :

“ He has had most favourable and happy speed :
Tempests themselves, high seas and howling winds,
The gutter'd rocks and congregated sands—
Traitors ensteep'd to clog the guiltless keel—
As having sense of beauty, do omit
Their mortal natures, letting go safely by
The divine Desdemona.”

Cassio proceeds in his admiring description, full of

¹ “ Painter or artist.”—Staunton’s notes.

devotion towards Othello, to whom he is always faithful :

"O behold,
The riches of the ship is come on shore,"

as Desdemona, with Iago, Emilia, the disguised Roderigo and attendants, now appear after a terrific sea-storm.

The position of Roderigo disguised on board the same ship as Desdemona was alike dangerous and interesting. He had thoroughly taken Iago's advice to follow Othello to Cyprus, but he is never recognised by any one, and so is only known to Iago. Cassio, doing the honours of Cyprus till Othello's arrival, exclaims, addressing those around :

"Ye men of Cyprus, let her have your knees.
Hail to thee, lady ! and the grace of heaven,
Before, behind thee, and on every hand,
Enwheel thee round !"

Desdemona, thanking him, asks eagerly for news of Othello, whose arrival all expect every moment. Cassio, always polite and courteous, salutes Emilia, while apologising for his freedom by saying :

"Let it not gall your patience, good Iago,
That I extend my manners ; 'tis my breeding
That gives me this bold show of courtesy."

He takes no notice of Roderigo, whom evidently none, except Iago, recognises. Iago, always observing

everybody and everything closely, sarcastically remarks of his wife, though with assumed good-humour :

“Sir, would she give you so much of her lips
As of her tongue she oft bestows on me,
You’d have enough.”

Desdemona, always attached to Emilia, vindicates her, though not offended with Iago, by saying kindly :

“Alas ! she has no speech,”

while Iago rejoins, apparently still in good-humour :

“I’ faith, too much ;
I find it still, when I have list to sleep :
Marry, before your ladyship, I grant,
She puts her tongue a little in her heart,
And chides with thinking.”

Emilia calmly replies :

“You have little cause to say so,”

and Iago answers in blunt words, intended apparently more to amuse than to irritate, and as if describing women generally :

“Come on, come on ; you are pictures out of doors,
Bells in your parlours, wild cats in your kitchens,
Saints in your injuries, devils being offended.”

Desdemona, protesting against this description, yet apparently not personally offended, exclaims :

“O fie upon thee, slanderer !”

and Iago answers :

“Nay, it is true, or else I am a Turk,”

and Emilia naturally observes :

“You shall not write my praise,”

and he retorts :

“No, let me not.”

Desdemona, as if amused, asks him :

“What wouldst thou write of me, if thou shouldst praise me?”

and Iago, now assuming politeness and always able, like Richard III., to “frame his face to all occasions,”¹ replies deferentially :

“O gentle lady, do not put me to ‘t;
For I am nothing, if not critical.”

Desdemona, eagerly awaiting Othello’s arrival, apparently tries to pass away the anxious time by thus questioning Iago, as if amused by his answers, while for a man of his mental powers to assume politeness or rough plainness is perhaps almost equally easy. She therefore unsuspectingly proceeds, as if addressing an amusing, friendly acquaintance instead of a relentless, crafty deceiver :

“Come, how wouldst thou praise me?”

¹ “Henry VI.,” Act III.

Iago wishing her to still believe him a frank, honest man, amusing and blunt, but incapable of deceit, replies :

“ I am about it ; but indeed my invention
Comes from my pate as birdlime does from frize ;
It plucks out brains and all : but my Muse labours,
And thus she is deliver’d.
If she be fair and wise, fairness and wit,
The one’s for use—the other useth it.”

Desdemona replies, perhaps recalling Othello to her mind :

“ Well praised ! How if she be black and witty ? ”

Iago replies, as if reversing the real state of things :

“ If she be black and thereto have a wit,
She’ll find a white that shall her blackness fit.”

Desdemona, diverted, yet hardly knowing what to say, exclaims :

“ Worse and worse,”

when Emilia, now joining in the conversation, perhaps wishing to amuse her mistress, asks her husband :

“ How if she be fair and foolish ? ”

and he readily answers :

“ She never yet was foolish that was fair ;
For even her folly help’d her to an heir.”

Desdemona, as if tired of this talk, or thinking it beneath her notice, exclaims :

“ These are old fond paradoxes, to make fools laugh in the ale-house”;

then again asks him :

“ What miserable praise hast thou for her that’s foul and foolish?”

Iago replies, as if wishing to be thought a woman-hater :

“ There’s none so foul and foolish thereunto,
But does foul pranks which fair and wise ones do.”

Desdemona then exclaims, wishing to hear him praise a virtuous woman if possible :

“ O heavy ignorance! thou praisest the worst best. But what praise couldst thou bestow on a deserving woman indeed—one that in the authority of her merit, did justly put on¹ the vouch of very malice itself?”

This question Iago answers in smooth, attractive language, proving how easily he can be polished or rough, alternately, though usually pretending to be frank and downright, to preserve his acquired reputation for plain honesty and steady faithfulness. Iago, now likely assuming a tender, sentimental tone, thus replies, describing an interesting heroine :

“ She that was ever fair and never proud;
Had tongue at will and yet was never loud;

¹ “ Provoke.”—Staunton’s notes.

Never lack'd gold and yet went never gay ;
Fled from her wish and yet said, ‘*Now I may* ;’
She that being anger'd, her revenge being nigh,
Bade her wrong stay and her displeasure fly ;

She that could think, and ne'er disclose her mind ;
See suitors following and not look behind ;
She was a wight, if ever such wight were——”

He evidently stops here, and Desdemona, curious to hear the conclusion of his singular description, asks :

“To do what ?”

Iago replies in his usual sarcastic manner, probably disappointing all but himself :

“To suckle fools and chronicle small beer.”

Desdemona, disappointed if not shocked, yet not angry, exclaims :

“O most lame and impotent conclusion !”

Then, addressing Emilia, whom she thoroughly likes and trusts :

“Do not learn of him, Emilia, though he be thy husband. How say you, Cassio? Is he not a most profane and liberal¹ counsellor?”

Cassio, apparently thinking himself much superior to Iago, not only in appearance, but in manner, is yet

¹ “Licitious.”—Staunton’s notes.

inclined to patronise him, and tries to excuse him as a good, blunt fellow, saying apologetically :

“He speaks home, madam ; you may relish him more in the soldier than in the scholar.”

While Cassio thus speaks with polite deference to Desdemona, Iago, like a malignant demon, watching both closely, thus reveals to himself thoughts and desires of which none who know him believe him capable :

“He takes her by the palm : ay, well said, whisper : with as little a web as this will I ensnare as great a fly as Cassio. Ay, smile upon her, do ; I will gyve¹ thee in thine own courtship. You say true ; 'tis so, indeed ; if such tricks as these strip you out of your lieutenancy, it had been better you had not kissed your three fingers so oft, which now again you are most apt to play the sir² in. Very good ; well kissed ! an excellent courtesy ! 'tis so, indeed. Yet again your fingers to your lips ?”

At this moment the expected Moor returns, announced by a trumpet, which Iago recognises. He is eagerly greeted by the devoted Desdemona, and he joyously exclaims, in words worthy of the poet indeed, but which few, if any, Moors were likely to use :

“O my soul's joy !
If after every tempest come such calms,
May the winds blow till they have wakened death !

... If it were now to die,
'Twere now to be most happy, for I fear

¹ “Fetter.”—Staunton's notes.

² “Courtier.”—Ibid.

My soul hath her content so absolute,
That not another comfort like this
Succeeds in unknown fate.”

And Desdemona answers in beautiful words :

“The heavens forbid
But that our loves and comforts should increase,
Even as our days do grow.”

Othello responds in a like spirit :

“Amen to that, sweet powers
I cannot speak enough of this content ;
It stops me here ; it is too much of joy.”

During these fond greetings Iago evidently watches them both keenly. While plotting their ruin, his malignant spirit secretly knows and despises their estimate of him, as he says to himself :

“O you are well tun’d now !
But I’ll set down the pegs that make this music,
As honest as I am.”

The general belief in his “honesty,” to which Iago here scornfully alludes, is alike shared by Othello, Cassio, and Roderigo, and apparently not contradicted by either Desdemona or Emilia. It may be said that in the whole play Iago is the only villain in it, while surrounded by kind, friendly, unsuspicious persons. If he had possessed his free choice he could hardly have found in Venice a set of acquaintances more easy to dupe or deceive than all his associates during this tragedy. Othello now announces that the war is over by Turkish disasters at sea, and tells

“good” Iago to follow him with money from his vessel to the citadel, and departs with Desdemona and attendants, but takes no notice of the disguised Roderigo, whom he now leaves alone with Iago. The latter then tells Roderigo that Desdemona is in love with Cassio. At first Roderigo exclaims, astonished :

“With him ! why, 'tis not possible,”

when Iago, well prepared how to deal with him, replies in words perhaps more deceiving than ever :

“Let thy soul be instructed. Mark me with what violence she first loved the Moor, but for bragging and telling her fantastical lies: and will she love him still for prating? let not thy discreet heart think it. Her eye must be fed, and what delight shall she have to look on the devil ? ”

Here Iago evinces the same intense prejudice against dark Orientals that Brabantio had expressed, and which at this period may have been usual enough in Christian Europe. At the present time and for many years past, owing to the vast increase of national intercourse, these horrified allusions either to Moors or negroes would be thought ridiculous, unless justified by some morally evil qualities. Roderigo probably fully shares in such prejudices, while Iago persists that Desdemona will soon tire of the Moor, saying :

“Very nature will instruct her in it and compel her to some second choice. Now, sir, this granted . . . who stands so eminent in the degree of this fortune as Cassio does? . . .

Besides, the knave is handsome, young, and hath all those requisites in him that folly and green minds look after: . . . and the woman hath found him already.”

Roderigo, who, though heart-broken at his rejection, always shows a generous if not noble spirit, replies, still incredulous:

“I cannot believe that in her; she is full of most blessed condition.”¹

Iago readily replies, in words well calculated to alter Roderigo’s opinion:

“*Blessed fig’s-end!* the wine she drinks is made of grapes; if she had been blessed, she would never have loved the Moor. . . . But, sir, be you ruled by me. I have brought you from Venice. Watch you to-night; for the command, I’ll lay it upon you. Cassio knows you not. I’ll not be far from you; do you find some occasion to anger Cassio, either by speaking too loud, or tainting his discipline, or from what other cause you please, which the time shall more favourably minister. . . . He is rash and very sudden in choler, and haply may strike at you: provoke him that he may, for even out of that will I cause these of Cyprus to mutiny, whose qualification² shall come into no true taste again, but by the displanting of Cassio. So shall you have a shorter journey to your desires by the means I shall then have to prefer them; and the impediment most profitably removed, without the which there were no expectation of our prosperity.”

Roderigo departs, agreeing to all Iago’s plans, and the latter then utters an instructive soliloquy, in which he reveals those plots, desires, and thoughts which he so ably conceals from all he knows. It is usual with the poet, as before observed, to make his chief

¹ “Disposition.”—Staunton’s notes.

² “Temperament.”—Ibid.

villains reveal themselves in this manner. Iago especially indulges in frequent soliloquy, having no trusted friend or adherent. Iago is, in fact, completely "himself alone" against the world, and has far more reason to say so than Richard III., to whom Shakespeare imputes the expression. For Iago trusts no one; in fact, nearly all he knows are his dupes, more or less, to be robbed and deceived as he pleases. He is, indeed, a virtual stranger in his real character to every one he deals with, and thus in secure solitude reveals his true feelings, desires, and opinions, which he confides to no ears but his own. He naturally suspects that a giddy, gay young man like Cassio would easily fall in love with the beautiful Desdemona, and has likely too little confidence in any one not to think that she might be tempted to return his love. His thoughts are now devoted to three credulous men—Othello, Cassio, and Roderigo, each brave enough, probably, when in personal danger, yet alike easily deceived by one whom they believe to be peculiarly honest and reliable. These three, in their different positions, Iago knows thoroughly, while they are equally and totally mistaken in him. In reviewing their different characters with all the calmness of familiar knowledge, Iago now says to himself:

" That Cassio loves her, I do well believe it ;
That she loves him, 'tis apt and of great credit :
The Moor, howbeit that I endure him not,
Is of a constant, loving, noble nature."

He again refers to Othello's suspected intimacy with

his wife, which Iago inclines to believe, though admitting he has no proof. The fact, indeed, of Othello being of a “ noble nature ” would be hardly consistent with his having a guilty intrigue with his trusted subordinate’s wife, yet Iago, having this idea in his mind, cannot get rid of it. He exclaims, with extraordinary inveteracy, to himself :

“ The thought whereof,
Doth like a poisonous mineral gnaw my inwards ;
And nothing can or shall content my soul
Till I am even’d with him, wife for wife,
Or failing so, yet that I put the Moor
At least into a jealousy so strong
That judgment cannot cure. Which thing to do,
If this poor trash of Venice [Roderigo] whom I trash ¹
For his quick hunting, stand the putting on,
I’ll have our Michael Cassio on the hip,
Abuse him to the Moor in the rank garb—
For I fear Cassio with my night-cap too—
Make the Moor thank me, love me and reward me,
For making him egregiously an ass,
And practising upon his peace and quiet
Even to madness.”

His plan how to manage or conduct all this treachery is not yet clear to his unassisted mind, but, quite determined in his course, he concludes :

“ 'Tis here, but yet confused :
Knavery’s plain face is never seen till us’d.”

In the next short scene a herald announces, in Othello’s name, that owing to the destruction of the Turkish fleet there should be general rejoicings throughout Cyprus :

¹ “ Impede.”—Staunton’s notes.

"Every man put himself into triumph, some to dance, some to make bonfires, each man to what sport and revels his addiction leads him: for, besides these beneficial news, it is the celebration of his nuptial. So much was his pleasure, should be proclaimed. All offices are open; and there is full liberty of feasting from this present hour of five till the bell have told eleven. Heaven bless the isle of Cyprus, and our noble general Othello."

This proclamation shows that peace is now established in the island, and from this time Shakespeare makes little, if any, historical allusion, devoting the rest of the play to the words and deeds of his imaginary personages.

In the next long scene are Othello, Desdemona, Cassio and attendants. The Moor, though of an excitable nature usually, shows calm good sense and love of order, as when he declined conflict with his enraged father-in-law, Brabantio, and his armed followers. He coolly addresses Cassio, now second in command at Cyprus, though little fitted for his trust :

"Good Michael, look you to the guard to-night :
Let's teach ourselves that honourable stop,
Not to outsport discretion."

Cassio earnestly, yet somewhat simply, answers :

"Iago hath direction what to do,
But notwithstanding with my personal eye
Will I look to 't."

Othello rejoins, with his usual complete confidence in his malignant foe :

"Iago is most honest.
Michael, good-night."

Hitherto the esteem of Othello and Cassio for Iago seems equally high. He is the “good” or the “honest” Iago of both, and up to this time he is trusted and relied on by all around him. Othello, with Desdemona and attendants, departs, leaving Cassio alone, when Iago appears. Their ensuing conversation proves the mistake of placing such a man as Cassio even by his own admission in nominal authority over the shrewd, crafty Iago, who in most matters important or trifling must have always been his superior. Cassio, fully trusting him, frankly begins :

“ Welcome, Iago ; we must to the watch.”

Iago coolly replies :

“ Not for this hour, lieutenant ; 'tis not yet ten o'clock. Our general cast ¹ us thus early for the love of his Desdemona.”

Cassio in sincere admiration replies :

“ She's a most exquisite lady.”

After further praise of Desdemona's beauty, Iago, wishing to encourage Cassio's admiration for her, asks him :

“ And when she speaks, is it not an alarum to love ? ”

to which Cassio rejoins enthusiastically :

“ She is indeed perfection.”

¹ “ Dismissed.”—Staunton's notes.

Iago, well knowing Cassio's jovial habits, has resolved to take advantage of them, and now tempts him, saying :

" Come, lieutenant, I have a stoup of wine ; and here without are a brace of Cyprus gallants that would fain have a measure to the health of black Othello."

Cassio, honest and trustful, replies in simple good faith, knowing his own weakness, yet unable to resist it, and with a sort of grateful regret :

" Not to-night, good Iago ; I have very poor and unhappy brains for drinking : I could well wish courtesy would invent some other custom of entertainment."

Iago merrily replies :

" O, they are our friends ; but one cup : I'll drink for you."

Cassio honestly, if not timidly, replies :

" I have drunk but one cup to-night, and that was craftily qualified too, and behold, what innovation it makes here. I am unfortunate in the infirmity, and dare not task my weakness with any more."

These words are very encouraging to Iago, who with assumed joyousness replies :

" What, man ! 'tis a night of revels : the gallants desire it."

Cassio, wavering, asks :

" Where are they ? "

and Iago promptly replies :

" Here at the door ; I pray you call them in."

Cassio, yielding more and more, yet rather mistrusting himself, replies :

“I'll do it, but it dislikes me,”

and he departs to call in the guests. Iago, when alone, again reveals his true mind, saying :

“If I can fasten but one cup upon him,
With that which he hath drunk to-night already,
He'll be as full of quarrel and offence
As my young mistress's dog. Now, my sick fool, Roderigo,
Whom love has almost turn'd the wrong side out,
To Desdemona hath to-night caroused
Potations pottle-deep ; and he's to watch :
Three lads of Cyprus—noble swelling spirits,

Have I to-night flustered with flowing cups,
And they watch too. Now, 'mongst this flock of drunkards,
Am I to put our Cassio in some action
That may offend the isle—but here they come :
If consequence do but approve my dream,
My boat sails freely, both with wind and stream.”

Everything now, indeed, seems to favour Iago's wishes, as Cassio re-enters with other gentlemen and attendants, having drunk more, and accompanied by Montano, the former Governor of Cyprus, who, though wise and temperate himself, is now in very giddy company. Cassio exclaims merrily :

“'Fore heaven, they have given me a rouse already,”

while Montano, perhaps not knowing what Cassio had drunk previously, observes :

“Good faith, a little one ; not past a pint, as I'm a soldier.”

Iago, calling for wine, begins to sing a jovial song :

“Come, let me the canakin clink, clink,
And let me the canakin clink :
A soldier’s a man,
Man’s life’s but a span ;
Why, then, let a soldier drink.”

Cassio, drinking more, exclaims with delight :

“Fore heaven, an excellent song !”

Iago replies in words which perhaps Shakespeare wrote to amuse or rally an English audience, but which it may be hoped are scarcely fair to English people, who were surely never so intemperate as some foreign nations :

“I learned it in England, where indeed they are most potent in potting ; your Dane, your German, and your swag-bellied Hollander—Drink, ho !—are nothing to your English.”¹

Cassio, to show his loyalty to Othello, now proposes a toast :

“To the health of our general.”

Montano, partly out of compliment to his illustrious successor, cordially agrees, exclaiming :

“I am for it, lieutenant, and I’ll do you justice.”

Iago exclaims :

“O sweet England !”

¹ “The Englishman’s potentiality in potting was a common topic of satire with our old writers.”—Staunton’s notes.

and then sings part of a homely old ballad which he has probably heard there, yet is not the least like a drinking song. Few, if any, English topers would have sung it, while probably no Italians would have endured it :

“ King Stephen was a worthy peer,
His breeches cost him but a crown ;
He held them sixpence all too dear ;
With that he called the tailor lown.

“ He was a wight of high renown,
And thou art but of low degree :
’Tis pride that pulls the country down ;
Then take thine auld cloak about thee.”¹

Iago’s quaint, simple old song, utterly unlike what either English or Italian officers would choose for a drinking party, is taken from an old English rural ballad, a duet between an English farmer and his wife about their sick cow. There is nothing merry, witty, or jovial about it ; and how or why Shakespeare ascribed such a song to Iago, and made it applauded even by the drunkard Cassio, is difficult if not impossible to explain. Its rustic simplicity, about cows and clothes, is amusingly shown in some lines not quoted by Shakespeare.² Yet surely there

¹ Hume’s account of King Stephen, as well as Green’s “ History of the English People,” admit this monarch’s generosity and prodigality, so that Iago’s song may be meant for a sarcasm, in alluding to this sovereign.

² After deplored the wintry weather, from which their cow is suffering, the old farmer exclaims to his wife Bell :

“ Then I’ll no longer borrow nor lend,
For once I’ll new apparel’d bee,
To-morrow I’ll to town and spend,
For I’ll have a new cloake about me.”

must have been many jovial ballads known in London at this period, and long before it, even if the poet was ignorant, as he probably was, of foreign vocal music. Cassio, however, applauds Iago's choice, as if it had been a brilliant "brindisi" of an Italian composer, or a spirit-stirring melody in heroic language, and exclaims delighted, though evidently more and more intoxicated :

"Why, this is a more exquisite song than the other.'

Iago asks :

"Will you hear it again?"

His wife replies in behalf of the cow, which she seems to care for more than his comfort :

"Cow Crombocke is a very good cow,
 Shee has been always true to the payle,
 Still has helpt us to butter and cheese, I trow,
 And other things she will not fayle ;
 I would be loth to see her pine,
 Good husband, councell take of me,
 It is not for us to goe so fine,
 Then take thine old cloake about thee."

The husband finally exclaims :

"Bell, my wife, she loves not strife,
 Yet she will lead me if she can,
 And oft to live a quiet life
 I am forced to yield, though I'me good man ;
 It's not for a man with a woman to threape, *
 Unless he first give o'er the plea ;
 Where I begun wee now mun leave,
 And take mine old cloake about me."
 —Staunton's notes.

* "Dispute."—Ibid.

But Cassio, his drunkenness quickly changing from merriment to gloom, grimly replies :

“No,”

and solemnly proceeds, though with some truth, to unconsciously censure his own present condition :

“For I hold him to be unworthy of his place that does these things. Well, heaven’s above all; and there are souls must be saved, and there be souls must not be saved.”

Iago, agreeing in these theological views, replies :

“It’s true, good lieutenant,”

and Cassio solemnly proceeds, evidently becoming more and more confused, yet always well-meaning :

“For mine own part—no offence to the general, nor any man of quality—I hope to be saved.”

Iago quietly observes, probably with a hardly suppressed sneer, as he offends Cassio :

“And so do I too, lieutenant.”

Cassio irritably retorts, as if he thought Iago presumptuous, and ought to be taught his place under himself :

“Ay, but by your leave, not before me; the lieutenant is to be saved before the ancient”;¹

¹ Ensign.

and proceeds in confused maundering :

“Let’s have no more of this ; let’s to our affairs. Forgive us our sins !”

Then becoming practical :

“Gentlemen, let’s look to our business. Do not think, gentlemen, I am drunk ; this is my ancient ; this is my right hand, and this is my left.”

Having now, he thinks, proved his sobriety by accuracy, he confidently appeals to his hearers :

“I am not drunk now ; I can stand well enough and I speak well enough.”

All exclaim, as if willing to please him :

“Excellent well,”

and poor Cassio, gratified at hearing this, feeling himself unfit to remain among his companions, yet trying to deny the state his conscience tells him he is in, replies uneasily as he departs :

“Why, very well then : you must not think, then, that I am drunk.”

Montano, unwilling to first mention Cassio’s drunkenness, knowing Othello’s confidence in him, proposes without allusion to him to set the watch, when Iago, as if in a friendly way, sarcastically exposes Cassio to the utmost, exclaiming :

“You see this fellow that is gone before ;
He is a soldier fit to stand by Cæsar

And give direction : and do but see his vice.

“ . . . ‘Tis pity of him
I fear the trust Othello puts him in,
On some odd time of infirmity,
Will shake this island.”

Montano, its former Governor, surprised and shocked, asks :

“ But is he often thus ? ”

and Iago, speaking as Cassio’s familiar acquaintance, replies :

“ ‘Tis evermore the prologue to his sleep.”

Montano, alarmed for the general good, and evidently a conscientious man, observes truly :

“ It were well the general were put in mind of it ;
Perhaps he sees it not ; or his good nature
Prizes the virtue that appears in Cassio,
And looks not on his evils ; is not this true ? ”

Iago does not answer, as Roderigo enters, whom he sends after Cassio, hoping to arouse a quarrel between them. Montano, a man of sense and feeling, yet who takes little part in this story till near its end, observes to Iago, wishing well to Othello’s authority :

“ And ‘tis great pity that the noble Moor
Should hazard such a place as his own second,
With one of an ingraft infirmity :
It were an honest action to say
So to the Moor.”

Montano, who hitherto knows nothing of Iago's real character or designs, elicits a crafty answer :

“ Not I, for this fair island :
I do love Cassio well ; and would do much
To cure him of this evil. But hark ! what noise ? ”

Cassio re-enters, pursuing Roderigo, abusing him, and exclaiming :

“ A knave teach me my duty !
I'll beat the knave into a twiggen bottle.”

He strikes Roderigo, and is held back by Montano, who, telling him he is drunk, is wounded by Cassio, while Iago now tells Roderigo to go out and cry “ a mutiny.” Roderigo, as usual, obeys Iago, and the latter exclaims aloud, pretending to be astonished and at his wits' end, while trying to increase the disturbance :

“ Nay, good lieutenant—alas, gentlemen ;
Help, ho !—Lieutenant—sir—Montano—sir ;
Help, masters ! Here's a goodly watch indeed ! ”

A bell here rings, and Iago, pretending to be alike shocked and astounded at everything, asks :

“ Who's that which rings the bell ? Diablo, ho !
The town will rise. Fie, fie, lieutenant, hold !
You will be shamed for ever.”

Othello now re-enters with attendants, while Montano faints, declaring himself mortally, though he is only slightly, wounded. Othello exclaims :

“ Hold, for your lives ! ”

and Iago, pretending to be confused and horrified, calls out :

“ Hold, ho ! Lieutenant—sir—Montano—gentlemen—
Have you forgot all sense of place and duty ?
Hold ! the general speaks to you ; hold, for shame ! ”

Othello, astonished at what he sees and hears around him, indignantly asks :

“ Why, how now, ho ! from whence ariseth this ? ”

He proceeds, addressing his Italian followers rather in the spirit of a Christian convert, yet alluding to Mohammedan sobriety :

“ Are we turned Turks, and to ourselves do that
Which heaven hath forbid the Ottomites ?
For Christian shame, put by this barbarous brawl :

Silence that dreadful bell : it frights the isle
From her propriety. What is the matter, masters ? ”

Then, always trusting Iago, who certainly proves himself an admirable actor, he asks :

“ Honest Iago, that look’st dead with grieving,
Speak, who began this ? On thy love, I charge thee.”

Iago, well assuming the part of an honest, perplexed man, wishing well to all, yet anxious to tell the truth, replies :

“ I do not know : friends all but now, even now,
In quarter, and in terms like bride and groom
. . . and then but now
(As if some planet had outwitted men)
Swords out and tilting one at other’s breast.

... I cannot speak
Any beginning to this peevish odds."¹

And he then utters a wish well calculated to convince and impress the brave and generous Othello :

" And would in action glorious I had lost
Those legs that brought me to a part of it ! "

Othello, satisfied with Iago, addresses Cassio :

" How comes it, Michael, you are thus forgot ? "

The unlucky Cassio, between the effects of drink and his confused distress, can only answer :

" I pray you, pardon me ; I cannot speak."

Othello then, with respect yet in remonstrance, addresses the wounded Montano :

" Worthy Montano, you were wont be civil ;
The gravity and stillness of your youth
The world hath noted, and your name is great
In mouths of wisest censure : what's the matter,
That you unlace your reputation thus
And spend your rich opinion ² for the name
Of a night-brawler ? give me answer to it."

Montano, weak from his wound, and greatly respecting Othello for his high reputation, truly replies, with evident difficulty, owing to his present state :

" Worthy Othello, I am hurt to danger :
Your officer, Iago, can inform you—
While I spare speech, which something now offends me—

¹ " Headstrong quarrel."—Staunton's notes.

² " Squander your valued estimation."—Ibid.

Of all that I do know : nor know I ought
By me that's said or done amiss this night ;
Unless self-charity be sometimes a vice,
And to defend ourselves it be a sin
When violence assails us.”

Othello, alike perplexed and irritated, can only exclaim :

“ Now, by heaven,
My blood begins my safer guides to rule,
. if I once stir,
Or do but lift this arm, the best of you
Shall sink in my rebuke. Give me to know
How this foul rout began, who set it on :
. What ! in a town of war,
Yet wild, the people's hearts brimful of fear,
In night, and on the court and guard of safety !
'Tis monstrous.”

Then, as usual referring to his evil genius, he asks :

“ Iago, who began 't ?”

Before Iago replies, Montano, perhaps with vague suspicion of him, or at least not placing the same implicit confidence in him that the others do, says to him in grave warning :

“ If partially affined,¹ or leagued in office,
Thou dost deliver more or less than truth,
Thou art no soldier ”

Iago, aware that Montano, though he may be suspicious, has no real knowledge of him, and justly

¹ “ Bound by partiality.”—Staunton's notes.

relying on Othello's complete confidence, with calm self-possession replies to both :

" Touch me not so near :
 I had rather have this tongue cut from my mouth
 Than it should do offence to Michael Cassio ;
 Yet, I persuade myself, to speak the truth
 Shall nothing wrong him."

He then proceeds to mingle truth with falsehood by mentioning a nameless stranger, who in reality was Roderigo :

" Thus it is, general,
 Montano and myself being in speech,
 There comes a fellow crying out for help ;
 And Cassio following him with determined sword,
 To execute upon him. Sir, this gentleman
 Steps in to Cassio, and entreats his pause :
 Myself the crying fellow did pursue,
 Lest by his clamour—as it so fell out—
 The town might fall in fright : he, swift of foot,
 Outran my purpose ; and I return'd the rather
 For that I heard the clink and fall of swords,
 And Cassio high in oath ; which till to-night
 I ne'er might say before. When I came back
 (For this was brief) I found them close together,
 At blow and thrust ; even as again they were
 When you yourself did part them.
 More of this matter cannot I report :
 But men are men ; the best sometimes forget :
 Though Cassio did some little wrong to him,
 As men in rage strike those that wish them best,
 Yet surely Cassio, I believe, received
 From him that fled some strange indignity,
 Which patience could not pass."

This account produces on the listening, credulous Othello precisely the effect Iago desired, and his reply must have delighted the latter to hear. Othello, quite

convinced of Iago's truth, yet now naturally liking rather than trusting Cassio, exclaims :

“I know, Iago,
Thy honesty and love doth mince this matter,
Making it light to Cassio.”

Then solemnly addressing the poor drunken dupe he exclaims :

“Cassio, I love thee ;
But never more be officer of mine.”

Desdemona now enters, and Othello, irritated at her being alarmed, exclaims :

“Look, if my gentle love be not raised up !
I'll make thee an example.”

She asks what the matter is, and Othello, telling her all is well, now addresses Montano :

“Sir, for your hurts myself will be your surgeon :
Lead him off.”

The wounded man is led away, and Othello, charging Iago to keep all quiet, departs with Desdemona, saying :

“Come, Desdemona, 'tis the soldiers' life
To have their balmy slumbers waked with strife.”

All depart except Iago and Cassio, when the former succeeds as well in deceiving the latter as he did when dealing with Roderigo, for these young Italians, the Venetian and the Florentine, rather resemble each

other in the easy way they are alike duped by their common tempter. Cassio passionately declares that he is hurt past all surgery, exclaiming :

“ Reputation, reputation, reputation ! O I have lost my reputation ! I have lost the immortal part of myself, and what remains is bestial.”

And appealing to Iago, as if to a friend, repeats :

“ My reputation, Iago, my reputation ! ”

Iago calmly rejoins, desiring for his own purposes to console him for the present :

“ As I am an honest man, I thought you had received some bodily wound ; there is more sense in that than in reputation.”

He proceeds in his characteristic, calm, sarcastic style to deny the value of a good reputation. In this denial Iago, considering his own undeserved reputation for honesty, unconsciously rather condemns himself :

“ Reputation is an idle and most false imposition ; oft got without merit, and lost without deserving ; you have lost no reputation at all, unless you repute yourself such a loser. What, man ! there are ways to recover the general again ; you are but now cast in his mood, a punishment more in policy than in malice ; . . . sue to him again, and he’s yours.”

Cassio, though well knowing Iago’s knowledge of and influence with Othello, is deeply ashamed of his late conduct, and in sincere penitence cannot help referring to it as he answers :

“ I will rather sue to be despised than to deceive so good a commander with so slight, so drunken, and so indiscreet an officer.”

Again recalling his foolishness, he passionately exclaims, in earnest self-reproach :

“Drunk? and speak parrot? and squabble? swagger? swear?”

And then in a repentant fit of sober enthusiasm he exclaims :

“O thou invisible spirit of wine, if thou hast no name to be known by, let us call thee devil.”

Iago, disregarding this idea, asks :

“What was he that you followed with your sword? What had he done to you?”

Cassio, really confused, yet trying to recollect the late drunken scene, can only reply, evidently with perfect frankness :

“I remember a mass of things, but nothing distinctly; a quarrel, but nothing wherefore.”

Then he utters words of truth indeed, worthy of a wiser man :

“O God, that men should put an enemy in their mouths to steal away their brains! that we should, with joy, pleasure, revel, and applause, transform ourselves into beasts!”

Iago, probably seldom drunk himself, yet well knowing how to deceive or victimise drunkards, replies, wishing to encourage Cassio and revive his spirits :

“Why, but you are now well enough; how came you thus recovered?”

Cassio, still ashamed and sad, answers :

“ It hath pleased the devil Drunkenness to give place to the devil Wrath : one unperfectness shows me another, to make me frankly despise myself.”

Iago admits that he regrets the late quarrel, owing to the disturbed state of Cyprus, adding :

“ But since it is as it is, mend it for your own good.”

Cassio, ashamed to address Othello again, continues to blame himself for his drunkenness, in a style not very unlike that of the young heroes in two famous novels of the last century, after their first dissipation. Sir Walter Scott and Charles Dickens, the former avowedly, the latter possibly, had Shakespeare’s drunken scene in mind when describing the remorseful feelings of Frank Osbaldistone and of David Copperfield immediately after drunken bouts.¹ Cassio proceeds in true humility :

¹ “ But with the morning cool repentance came . . . and I descended to the breakfast hall like a criminal to receive sentence . . . I hastened to meet Rashleigh and to express myself in the highest degree sorry for the rudeness with which I had acted on the preceding evening. . . . ‘ Indeed,’ he said, ‘ I have so poor a brain myself, when I impose on it the least burden beyond my usual three glasses, that I have only, like honest Cassio, a very vague recollection of the confusion of last night.’ ”—“ Rob Roy,” chap. 12.

Yet Frank’s penitence, though sincere, is exceeded in intensity by Dickens’s young hero after a similar indulgence : “ But the agony of mind, the remorse and shame I felt, when I became conscious the next day. My horror of having committed a thousand offences I had forgotten and which nothing could ever expiate . . . My disgust of the sight of the very room where the revel had been held —my racking head—Oh, what a day it was! ”—“ David Copperfield,” chap. 24.

“I will ask him for my place again ; he shall tell me that I am a drunkard ! Had I as many mouths as Hydra,¹ such an answer would stop them all. To be now a sensible man, and by and by a fool, and presently a beast ! O strange ! Every inordinate cup is unblessed, and the ingredient a devil.”

Iago, who likely can enjoy a drinking bout without ever letting it confuse his hardened mind, replies rather impatiently :

“Come, come, good wine is a good familiar creature if it be well used ; exclaim no more against it. And, good lieutenant, I think you think I love you.”

The confiding, self-reproachful Cassio replies :

“I have well approved it, sir,”

then, again recalling his misconduct, he exclaims, as if partly stupefied by regret :

“I drunk !”

and pauses. Iago now diverts him from his self-reproaches, giving apparently friendly advice, which, as before, quite deceives Cassio. He exclaims, as if in good-natured raillery :

“You or any man living may be drunk at some time, man. I'll tell you what you shall do. Our general's wife is now the general,—I may say so in this respect, for that he hath devoted and given up himself to the contemplation, mark, and denotement of her parts and graces ;—confess yourself freely to her, importune her help to put you in your place again ; she is of so free, so kind, so apt, so blessed a disposition, she holds it a vice in her goodness not to do more than she is requested.”

¹ Shakespeare here makes this young Italian recall an ancient Greek monster, celebrated by some classical writers as “possessing one hundred heads” (Lempriere's Classical Dictionary).

Cassio, to whom this counsel is most pleasing, owing to his admiration for Desdemona as well as respect for Othello, replies with evident confidence :

“ You advise me well. . . . and, betimes in the morning, I will beseech the virtuous Desdemona to undertake for me. I am desperate of my fortunes if they check me here.”

Cassio now departs, saying :

“ Good-night, honest Iago,”

and leaving Iago alone, who utters an extraordinary soliloquy, in some respects different from what he ever says before or after it. While hardened, firm, and practical as ever in his purposes, he indulges in a strange self-examination, difficult if not impossible to explain. He is apparently not a thoughtful or a philosophical atheist, as he alludes to invisible powers of evil being more potent than mankind. He does not, however, long dwell on the subject, but soon returns to his present worldly position, hating all immediately around him, while recalling their different qualities and feelings, and resolved, as if inspired by “ the Divinity of Hell ” he mentions, to effect their ruin. He exclaims, questioning himself :

“ And what’s he then that says I play the villain ?
When this advice is free I give, . . .
Probal¹ to thinking and indeed the course
To win the Moor again ? For ‘tis most easy
The inclining Desdemona to subdue
In any honest suit. . . .”

He alludes to Othello’s being a Christian, intimating

¹ Probable.

as an instance of Desdemona’s influence that she might even induce him to change his faith, if she chose.

“And then for her
To win the Moor,—were ’t to renounce his baptism,
All seals and symbols of redeemed sin,
His soul is so enfetter’d to her love,
That she may make, unmake, do what she list.

... How am I then a villain
To counsel Cassio to this parallel course,
Directly to his good? Divinity of Hell!
When devils will the blackest sins put on,¹
They do suggest² at first with heavenly shows,
As I do now; for while this honest fool
Plies Desdemona to repair his fortunes,
And she for him pleads strongly to the Moor
I’ll pour this pestilence into his ear”—

meaning, that she loves Cassio. He then calculates with unerring exactness how likely his plot will succeed with his brave and generous yet unsuspicious dupes:

“And by how much she strives to do him good,
She shall undo her credit with the Moor.
So will I turn her virtue into pitch;
And out of her own goodness make the net
That shall enmesh them all.”

Here Roderigo enters, disappointed, and complaining, but as yet expressing no actual doubt of Iago’s honesty. He exclaims, in almost comic discontent:

“I do follow here in the chase, not like a hound that hunts, but one that fills up the cry. My money is almost spent; I have been

¹ “Instigate.”—Staunton’s notes.

² “Entice.”—Ibid.

to-night exceedingly well cudgelled, and I think the issue will be, I shall have so much experience for my pains, and so, with no money at all and a little more wit, return again to Venice."

Though poor Roderigo has likely lost his money, he apparently has not gained any wit by the expenditure ; while Iago, who finds both him and Cassio almost equally easy dupes, now regains complete influence by words in which real wisdom and secret deceit are marvellously combined. He exclaims :

" How poor are they that have not patience !
What wound did ever heal but by degrees ?
Thou know'st we work by wit, and not by witchcraft ;
And wit depends on dilatory time."

None indeed can contradict this truth, which the luckless Roderigo never tries to do, and Iago, becoming suddenly practical, artfully asks :

" Does't not go well ? Cassio hath beaten thee,
And thou, by that small hurt, hath cashiered Cassio :

Content thyself awhile. . . .
Retire thee ; go where thou art billeted :
Away, I say ; thou shalt know more hereafter :
Nay, get thee gone."

Roderigo without another word departs, and Iago, again left to himself, concludes his fearful soliloquy, acting and thinking entirely by himself, without friend or confederate :

" . . . Two things are to be done,—
My wife must move for Cassio to her mistress :
I'll set her on :

Myself the while to draw the Moor apart,
And bring him jump when he may Cassio find
Soliciting his wife—ay, that's the way.”

Having thus arranged his plans in regular due order, he concludes, as if in excited eagerness :

“Dull not device by coldness and delay.”

Thus ends the second act, and the third introduces Cassio with some unwelcome musicians playing likely a discordant salute in honour of Othello.

A witty clown, whose name is not given, thus gets rid of them, saying :

“Masters, here's money for you, and the general so likes your music that he desires you of all loves¹ to make no more noise with it. . . . If you have any music that may not be heard, to 't again; but, as they say, to hear music the general does not greatly care.”

Whether this odd message was really sent by Othello or is the man's invention is not clear; probably the Moor sent word to stop the music and the clown invented the precise message in his peculiar style. After the musicians depart, Cassio says to the clown, whom he pays :

“If the gentlewoman that attends the general's wife be stirring, tell her there's one Cassio entreats her a little favour of speech.”

The clown agrees and departs, when Iago appears, who promises to aid Cassio in procuring him an inter-

¹ “For love's sake.”—Staunton's notes.

view with Desdemona, and receives Cassio's warm thanks, who exclaims, as Iago departs :

"I never knew
A Florentine more kind and honest."

Emilia enters, consoling Cassio by saying that Desdemona is already pleading for him with Othello, who, though owning his love for Cassio, is deeply offended at his conduct, especially in wounding Montano. Cassio begs to see Desdemona alone, and Emilia replies :

"Pray you come in :
I will bestow you where you shall have time
To speak your bosom freely."

They withdraw accordingly, and in the next scene Othello appears with Iago and attendants.

He says to his trusted ancient :

"These letters give, Iago, to the pilot,
And by him do my duties to the Senate :
That done, I will be walking on the works ;
Repair there to me."

Iago promises obedience to all directions, and the next scene is in the Castle garden, where Cassio converses with Desdemona and Emilia. The former promises to do all she can in his behalf, while Emilia, though Iago's wife, displays the same utter ignorance of her husband's real character shown by all the rest of his acquaintance when referring to Cassio's disgrace, in perfect sincerity :

. . . "I warrant it grieves my husband,
As if the cause were his" ;

and Desdemona, equally deceived, exclaims, referring to Iago :

“O, that’s an honest fellow,”

and proceeds, comforting the penitent Cassio :

“Do not doubt, Cassio,
But I will have my lord and you again
As friendly as you were”;

and Cassio gratefully replies :

“Bounteous madam,
Whatever shall become of Michael Cassio,
He’s never anything but your true servant.”

Desdemona, with kind enthusiasm, replies :

“I know’t, I thank you. You do love my lord ;
You have known him long before Emilia here,
I give thee warrant of thy place ; assure thee,
If I do vow a friendship I’ll perform it
To the last article ; my lord shall never rest.

“I’ll intermingle everything he does
With Cassio’s suit ; therefore be merry, Cassio,
For thy solicitor shall rather die,
Than give thy cause away.”

Othello, with Iago, now approaches, and Cassio retires, fearing that even the sight of him after all that has occurred may offend his commander.

Iago exclaims aloud, at seeing Cassio departing :

“Ha ! I like not that.”

He says these words only for Othello to hear, who may not at first catch their full import, and asks :

“ Was not that Cassio parted from my wife ? ”

Iago replies, affecting surprise :

“ Cassio, my lord ? No, sure, I cannot think it,
That he would steal away so guilty like,
Seeing you coming.”

Othello replies :

“ I do believe 'twas he,”

when Desdemona says :

“ How now, my lord ?
I have been talking with a suitor here,
A man that languishes in your displeasure,
. . . your lieutenant, Cassio,”

and asks leave to call him back, but Othello refuses, and, as if already uneasy in his mind, puts off Desdemona, who vainly entreats him to name a time as soon as possible to hear Cassio ; while Othello, wearied by or doubtful about her importunity, yet wishing to please her, replies at length :

“ Prythee no more, let him come when he will ;
I will deny thee nothing,”

and asks her to leave him for a little time, while evidently the few words, and likely the suspicious looks, of Iago already perplex his mind, as when Desdemona departs he exclaims passionately :

“ Excellent wretch ! Perdition catch my soul,
But I do love thee ! and when I love thee not,
Chaos is come again.”

This is now the moment for Iago to resume his secret insinuation, and he asks, as if in simple curiosity :

“ Did Michael Cassio, when you wooed my lady,
Know of your love ? ”

Othello replies without the least suspicion of his questioner :

“ He did, from first to last : why dost thou ask ? ”

Iago answers :

“ But for a satisfaction of my thought ;
No further harm ” ;

yet, despite these quiet words, Iago’s manner makes the Moor uneasy, as he asks another question :

“ Why of thy thought, Iago ? ”

and Iago calmly rejoins :

“ I did not think he had been acquainted with her, ”

when Othello says :

“ O yes, and went between us very oft. ”

Iago now says one word, but evidently with a look and tone of deep meaning :

“ Indeed ! ”

which the observant, listening Othello repeats with surprise and some suspicion, exclaiming :

“ Indeed ! ay, indeed ; discern’st thou aught in that ?
Is he not honest ? ”

Iago replies :

“ Honest, my lord ? ”

and Othello repeats emphatically :

“ Honest ! ay, honest.”

Iago answers with assumed simplicity :

“ My lord, for aught I know.”

He thus induces Othello to repeat his eager question ; likely gratified at prolonging his anxiety, while the Moor, becoming more and more uneasy at Iago's manner of speaking, asks :

“ What dost thou think ? ”

Again Iago repeats in the same provoking style :

“ Think, my lord ? ”

and Othello emphatically rejoins, perhaps trying to imitate Iago's cold or embarrassed manner, to induce him to be more open :

“ Think, my lord ! ”

By heaven, he echoes me,
As if there were some monster in his thought
Too hideous to be shown.”

Then, apprehending that Iago knows more than he reveals, he earnestly addresses him :

*“ Thou dost mean something :
I heard thee say, but now, thou lik'st not that,
When Cassio left my wife : what didst not like ?
And when I told thee he was of my counsel*

In my whole course of wooing, thou criedst, ‘*Indeed!*’
And didst contract and purse thy brow together,
As if thou then hadst shut up in thy brain
Some horrible conceit. If thou dost love me,
Show me thy thought.”

Iago, calmly observing, and doubtless enjoying Othello’s agitation, increases it by delaying his reply and quietly protesting :

“ My lord, you know I love you,”

and Othello rejoins, precisely as Iago would have wished :

“ I think thou dost ;
And, for I know thou’rt full of love and honesty,
And weigh’st thy words before thou giv’st them breath,
Therefore these stops of thine fright me the more ;
For such things in a false disloyal knave
Are tricks of custom ; but in a man that’s just
They’re close delations, working from the heart,
That passion ¹ cannot rule.”

Iago, steadily maintaining by his wonderful art his general reputation for honesty, then says, doubtless with every appearance of sincerity :

“ For Michael Cassio,
I dare be sworn I think that he is honest.”

Othello, probably feeling a momentary relief, rejoins :

“ I think so, too.”

Yet this relief is of short duration, for Iago, resuming

¹ “ Prudence.”—Staunton’s notes.

his cautious, if not suspicious manner, proceeds in words of calm reasoning :

“ Men should be what they seem ;
Or those that be not, would they might seem none.”

Othello repeats these words, pondering upon them :

“*Certain, men should be what they seem.*”

Iago then exclaims, as if trusting more to general probability or rule than to his knowledge of Cassio :

“ Why, then ! I think Cassio’s an honest man.”

Still Iago’s constrained words and manner prolong, if they do not somewhat arouse, Othello’s suspicions, for he exclaims, in evident perplexity :

“ Nay, yet there’s more in this ;
I pray thee speak to me as to thy thinkings,
As thou dost ruminate ; and give thy worst of thoughts
The worst of words.”

To this rather comprehensive and hardly reasonable request Iago demurs with a calm, respectful deference, as if pleading for the rights of men in general :

“ Good my lord, pardon me :
Though I am bound to every act of duty,
I am not bound to that all slaves are free to.
Utter my thoughts ? Why, say they are vile and false ;
As where’s that palace whereinto foul things
Sometimes intrude not ? Who has a breast so pure,
But some uncleanly apprehensions
Keep leets and law-days, and in sessions sit
With meditations lawful ? ”

Othello, aroused, but not yet irritated, by his follower's apparent unwillingness to say more, exclaims earnestly :

“Thou dost conspire against thy friend, Iago,
If thou but think'st him wrong'd, and mak'st his ear
A stranger to thy thoughts.”

Iago, whose thorough knowledge of Othello's hot, yet generous temper almost gives him a complete, if not easy, advantage over him, replies with assumed frankness, which he knows will deceive the Moor :

“I do beseech you—
Though I perchance am vicious in my guess
(As, I confess, it is my nature's plague
To spy into abuses, and oft my jealousy
Shapes faults that are not)—that your wisdom yet,
From one that so imperfectly conceits,
Would take no notice; nor build yourself a trouble
Out of his scattering and unsure observance.”

Thus having cautiously depreciated himself, Iago adopts a friendly, considerate style, adding :

“It were not for your quiet nor your good,
Nor for my manhood, honesty nor wisdom,
To let you know my thoughts.”

Othello, utterly perplexed, yet with unshaken confidence in Iago, asks :

“What dost thou mean?”

and the other readily replies, in words which seem carefully prepared and suited for this momentous occasion :

“Good name in man and woman, dear my lord,
Is the immediate jewel of their souls :

Who steals my purse, steals trash ; 'tis something, nothing ;
 'Twas mine, 'tis his, and has been slave to thousands ;
 But he that filches from me my good name,
 Robs me of that which not enriches him,
 And makes me poor indeed."

These celebrated words, so often quoted, briefly expressing so vast an amount of truth, are well worthy of the wisest philosopher or theologian who has ever enlightened mankind. Yet Shakespeare attributes them here to a deceitful villain devoting them to the vilest purposes. Their influence naturally excites Othello deeply, without adding to his information ; their force and truth completely seize upon his mind as he exclaims, in bewildered, yet keen anxiety :

" By heaven, I'll know thy thoughts."

Iago truly replies to this burst of excitement :

" You cannot, if my heart were in your hand,
 Nor shall not, while 'tis in my custody."

Othello exclaims :

" Ha ! "

in increasing anxiety ; and Iago, with apparent sympathy, proceeds to instil the worst suspicion into Othello's agitated mind, saying, as if in warning :

" O beware, my lord, of jealousy ;
 It is the green-ey'd monster which doth mock
 The meat it feeds on . . .

• • • • •
 But, O, what damned minutes tells he o'er
 Who dotes, yet doubts ; suspects, yet soundly loves ! "

Othello from his heart exclaims :

“O misery !”

while Iago proceeds :

“Poor and content is rich and rich enough,
But riches fineless¹ is as poor as winter
To him who ever fears he shall be poor :
Good heaven, the souls of all my tribe defend
From jealousy.”

Iago’s apparent sincerity in these emphatic words produces the desired effect on Othello, who, always believing him the perfection of honesty, asks with increasing vehemence :

“Why, why is this ?
Think’st thou I’d make a life of jealousy,
To follow still the changes of the moon
With fresh suspicions ? No ; to be once in doubt
Is once to be resolv’d :

. 'Tis not to make me jealous
To say my wife is fair, feeds well, loves company,
Is free of speech, sings, plays, and dances well ;
Where virtue is, these are more virtuous :
Nor from mine own weak merits will I draw
The smallest fear or doubt of her revolt ;
For she had eyes, and chose me. No, Iago ;
I’ll see before I doubt, when I doubt prove ;
And on the proof there is no more but this—
Away at once with love or jealousy !”

This frank declaration well displays Othello’s open nature, yet its intimating thorough reliance on Iago is much what the latter wishes to hear him say. Iago

¹ “Endless.”—Staunton’s notes.

therefore rejoins, as if Othello's true friend, resolved to tell the truth even at his own peril and with pretended relief :

“I am glad of this : for now I shall have reason
To show the love and duty that I bear you,
With franker spirit ; therefore, as I am bound,
Receive it from me : I speak not yet of proof.”

Then in words of calm, cautious warning he proceeds :

“Look to your wife ; observe her well with Cassio ;
Wear your eyes thus—not jealous nor secure :
I would not have your free and noble nature,
Out of self-bounty, be abused ; look to 't,
I know our country disposition well ;
In Venice they do let heaven see the pranks
They dare not show their husbands ; their best conscience
Is not to leave undone, but keep unknown.”

Othello, suspicious and wondering, knowing that Iago's acquaintance with Venice and Venetians must be far greater than his own, asks in astonishment :

“Dost thou say so ?”

Iago now refers to Desdemona's weakest point in deceiving her fond, trustful father, and replies, in words which Othello knows cannot be contradicted :

“She did deceive her father, marrying you ;
And when she seem'd to shake and fear your looks,
She lov'd them most.”

Othello, almost overcome at hearing the past so unexpectedly recalled to his troubled mind, exclaims :

“And so she did.”

Iago, thus encouraged by Othello's increasing alarm, steadily proceeds :

“ Why, go to then ;
She that, so young, could give out such a seeming,
To seal her father's eyes up, close as oak,—
He thought 'twas witchcraft :—”

This being once Brabantio's expressed idea, its mention naturally produces strong effect on Othello's recollection, and Iago thinks it best now to feign regret at his own freedom, exclaiming, as he breaks off abruptly :

“ But I am much to blame ;
I humbly do beseech you of your pardon,
For too much loving you.”

Othello, his excitable mind being touched by this appeal from one he believed so faithful, warmly replies :

“ I am bound to thee for ever.”

Iago, perceiving his increasing emotion, gently notices it with apparent sympathy, observing :

“ I see this hath a little dash'd your spirits.”

Othello, no dissembler at any time, tries to assume a firmness which he is far from feeling, as he says what is not true, though the most truthful of men :

“ Not a jot, not a jot.”

His thus trying to conceal or deny his agitation only

makes it the plainer to a man of Iago's keen observation, who rejoins :

“ I' faith, I fear it has ;
 I hope you will consider what is spoke
 Comes from my love—but I do see you're mov'd—
 I am to pray you not to strain my speech
 To grosser issues, nor to larger reach
 Than to suspicion.”

Othello replies :

“ I will not.”

while Iago, anxious to guard himself from the chance of Othello's suspecting him, proceeds :

“ Should you do so, my lord,
 My speech should fall into such vile success
 As my thoughts aim not at. Cassio's my worthy friend.”

Perhaps Othello, at hearing this name, looks more agitated, for Iago, breaking off again, observes :

“ My lord, I see you're mov'd.”

Othello, knowing that the other sees his anxiety, partly admits it, replying :

“ No, not much mov'd”—

then in apparent hesitation adds, as if soliciting sympathy :

“ I do not think but Desdemona's honest.”

Iago, assuming complete frankness and cordiality, rejoins, as if to please him :

“ Long live she so, and long live you to think so !”

Yet Othello, unable to recover from the effects of Iago's insinuations and uneasily recalling them, observes :

“And yet, how nature erring from itself——”

Iago here eagerly rejoins, rightly guessing the current of the other's thoughts, and again rousing his suspicion, alluding to Desdemona's refusal of many Italian lovers :

“Ay, there's the point : as—to be bold with you—
Not to affect many proposed matches
Of her own clime, complexion, and degree,
Whereto we see in all things nature tends,—
Foh ! one may smell in such a will most rank,
Foul disproportion, thoughts unnatural.”

He interrupts himself, as if afraid of having said too much, and apologising for his plain speaking, says :

“But, pardon me, I do not in position
Distinctly speak of her ; though I may fear,
Her will, recoiling to her better judgment,
May fall to match you with her country forms,
And happily repent.”

He thus, without naming Roderigo, reminds Othello of Desdemona's many Italian suitors, and also of his own singular, if not repelling, appearance and Moorish origin. These facts were often likely in Othello's mind, who in evident dejection stops this dangerous conversation, sadly exclaiming :

“Farewell, farewell ;
If more thou dost perceive, let me know more.”

He then completely reveals his aroused suspicion by adding :

“Set on thy wife to observe.”

This unworthy, degrading direction probably tries his proud mind severely, as he only adds, as if unable or unwilling to pursue the subject further at present :

“Leave me, Iago.”

The latter goes a short way, when Othello exclaims to himself, evidently believing Iago more and more :

“Why did I marry? This honest creature doubtless Sees and knows more, much more, than he unfolds.”

Iago, perceiving his agitation, returns and says, in mingled uncertainty and sympathy :

“My lord, I would I might entreat your honour To scan this thing no further; leave it to time.”

He proceeds with suppressed sarcasm as to Cassio, yet doubtless with all appearance of sincerity :

“Although 'tis fit that Cassio have his place,
For, sure, he fills it up with great ability,
Yet, if you please to hold him off awhile,
You shall by that perceive him and his means:
Note if your lady strain his entertainment¹
With any strong or vehement importunity;
Much will be seen in that. In the meantime,
Let me be thought too busy in my fears,
And hold her free, I do beseech your honour.”

Othello replies :

“Fear not my government,”

and Iago again departs, when Othello, alone, utters his thoughts; he is fearful and perplexed, yet still

¹ “Reinstatement.”—Staunton’s notes.

preserves his usual confidence in Iago, of whose wisdom as well as fidelity he has the highest opinion, when he exclaims about him :

“This fellow’s of exceeding honesty,
And knows all qualities, with a learned spirit,
Of human dealings.”

This opinion is doubtless caused by Iago’s superior knowledge of his Italian fellow-countrymen, with whom this Moorish general’s fate and fortunes are now so strangely involved. He exclaims, as if he knew something of the sport of falconry, which is not likely, considering his origin and position, comparing Desdemona to a “wild unreclaimed hawk,”¹ and saying that if she is false he will—

“Whistle her off and let her down the wind,
To prey at fortune.”

He then tries in a confused way to understand the reason for Desdemona’s suspected infidelity, in which he is now gradually believing, and exclaims :

“Haply for I am black,
And have not those soft parts of conversation
That chamberers have ; or, for I am declin’d
Into the vale of years,—yet that’s not much ;—
She’s gone. I am abus’d, and my relief
Must be to loathe her.”

After indulging in more bitter and sad regrets, Desdemona enters. The sight of her innocent beauty almost quells his new suspicion for the moment, as he exclaims to himself impulsively :

“If she be false, O, then heaven mocks itself !
I’ll not believe it.”

¹ Staunton’s notes.

Desdemona addresses him, inquiring why he speaks so faintly ; he complains of pains in his forehead ; she tries to bind a handkerchief on it, which he drops, and departing with Desdemona, leaves Emilia alone. She picks up the handkerchief, exclaiming :

“I am glad I have found this napkin.
 This was her first remembrance¹ from the Moor.
 My wayward husband hath a hundred times
 Woo'd me to steal it ; but she so loves the token,—
 For he conjur'd her she should ever keep it,—
 That she reserves it evermore about her,
 To kiss and talk to. I'll have the work ta'en out,
 And give t' Iago ;
 What he will do with it, Heaven knows, not I ;
 I nothing, but to please his fantasy.”

Though Emilia was greatly to blame for taking the handkerchief, her words prove she is quite ignorant of her husband's real character and designs. There exists a strong mutual attachment between her and her mistress, and she doubtless believes in the equally strong attachment between her husband and Othello. She evidently thinks that Iago has some strange fancy to have it, and hitherto has apparently as much confidence in his reputed honesty as Othello, Cassio and Roderigo undoubtedly have. Iago now enters, and she gives him the handkerchief, saying first :

“I have a thing for you.”

He at first sarcastically says it is a common thing—

“To have a foolish wife,”

¹ “Memorial.”—Staunton's notes.

as he evidently thinks her, but when he sees it, he exclaims in momentary good-humour :

“A good wench ; give it me.”

She hesitates, asking what he will do with it ; he snatches it from her, replying :

“What’s that to you ?”

and she, as if sorry for what she has done, vainly remonstrates, saying :

“If it be not for some purpose of import,
Give it me again : poor lady ! she’ll run mad,
When she shall lack it.”

Iago, who evidently awes her, despite her trust in him, sternly replies :

“Be not acknon¹ on’t ; I have use for it ;
Go, leave me.”

She departs, and Iago, when alone, as usual reveals his plans, which none are to know :

“I will in Cassio’s lodging lose this napkin
And let him find it.”

Then, with that knowledge of mankind which he unfortunately possesses, observes with truth :

“Trifles light as air,
Are to the jealous confirmation strong
As proofs of holy writ ; this may do something.
The Moor already changes with my poison :
Dangerous conceits are in their natures poisons,
Which at the first are scarce found to distaste,
But with a little act upon the blood,
Burn like the mines of sulphur.”

¹ “Be not you known on’t.”—Staunton’s notes.

Othello approaches, and Iago, perceiving him, proceeds with malignant triumph, worthy of the fiend with whom he when alone seems to commune :

“I did say so—
Look, where he comes! Not poppy, nor mandragora,
Nor all the drowsy syrups of the world,
Shall ever medicine thee to that sweet sleep
Which thou ow’dst yesterday.”

His commander and yet his dupe enters, exclaiming, as if now inclined to believe his wife’s innocence :

“Ha! ha! false to me?”

and Iago says :

“Why, how now, general! no more of that.”

Othello, grieved or irritated at his voice, though still partly trusting him, vehemently exclaims :

“Avaunt! be gone! thou hast set me on the rack,—
I swear, ‘tis better to be much abus’d
Than but to know’t a little . . .

He that is robb’d, not wanting what is stol’n,
Let him not know’t and he’s not robb’d at all.”

Iago, in apparent deep sympathy, and confidently reckoning on Othello’s firm reliance on him, exclaims, assuming the tone of real compassion :

“I am sorry to hear this.”

The distracted Othello proceeds, foreseeing a life of suspicious anxiety before him, a state of mind he had evidently never known during his former glorious military career, and mournfully utters those celebrated

words that are so universally admired, but which at their deliverance were only heard by Iago :

“O now, for ever,
Farewell the tranquil mind ! farewell content !
Farewell the plumed troop, and the big wars
That make ambition virtue !”

This idea, natural enough in a man whose happiest days were spent in the army, might find little favour with philanthropists, yet many great generals—Napoleon the First especially—would have cordially shared it ; Othello, now recalling his past life with the deepest regret, and rather suddenly abandoning all hopes of future happiness, while loving every recollection of his military profession, continues :

“O farewell !
Farewell the neighing steed and the shrill trump,
The spirit-stirring drum, the ear-piercing fife,¹
The royal banner and all quality,
Pride, pomp, and circumstance of glorious war !
And O, you mortal engines, whose rude throats
The immortal Jove’s dread clamours counterfeit,
Farewell ! Othello’s occupation’s gone !”

Yet while uttering these despairing words, he is still holding the chief command of the Venetian forces in Cyprus, having as yet expressed no intention of resigning his high and responsible position. The way in which Othello here abandons all idea of political and professional duty, owing to disappointed love, may recall Mark Antony’s words also renoun-

¹ “In mentioning the *fife* joined with the *drum*, Shakespeare as usual paints from the life ; those instruments accompanying each other, being used in his age by the English soldiery.”—Staunton’s notes.

cing both when completely devoted to Cleopatra.¹ In each case Shakespeare describes triumphant warriors, the Roman and the Moor, abandoning all ambition, duty, and interest owing to the influence of love: in Antony's instance for its gratification, in Othello's from its disappointment. In describing the happiness of a soldier's life and the glory of warfare, Othello, however, omits to name their attendant miseries, the wounds, the maiming, and the hospital, which in real life so fearfully counterbalance the pleasure or the excitement of a military career. His regretful words perhaps more resemble those of an enthusiastic young soldier than of a general who must have known or endured the cares, anxieties and sorrows of warlike campaigns. Iago begins to speak, when Othello, as if maddened at the sound of his tormenting voice, for the first and only time till too late, fully suspects him, and seizing him by the throat, threatens him unless he proves his words, exclaiming in wild excitement :

“ If thou dost slander her and torture me,
Never pray more; abandon all remorse;
On horror's head horrors accumulate:
Do deeds to make heaven weep, all earth amaz'd;
For nothing canst thou to damnation add,
Greater than that.”

His sudden, dangerous fury now again arouses Iago's wonderful powers of deceit, and, like an able

¹ “ Let Rome in Tiber melt and the wide arch
Of the rang'd empire fall ! Here is my space.”
“ Antony and Cleopatra,” Act I., Scene 2.

actor, he assumes the part of an injured, honest man, whose devotion and love of truth now endanger his life, and he exclaims with unwonted vehemence, all the more convincing in a man of his self-control :

“O grace ! O heaven, defend me !
Are you a man ? have you a soul or sense ?—
God be with you ; take mine office.—O wretched fool,
That liv’st to make thine honesty a vice !—
O monstrous world ! Take note, take note, O world,
To be direct and honest is not safe.—
I thank you for this profit ; and, from hence,
I’ll love no friend, since love breeds such offence.”

The well assumed frankness of this declaration confounds the enraged Othello, who, evidently hesitating, replies :

“Nay, stay ; thou shouldst be honest.”

Iago answers, as if full of just indignation and injured innocence :

“I should be wise ; for honesty’s a fool,
And loses that it works for.”

Othello, apparently at his wit’s end between his trust in Iago and his love for Desdemona, while trying to balance his esteem for the former with his affection for the latter, replies in eager excitement :

“By the world,
I think my wife be honest, and think she is not ;
I think that thou art just, and think thou art not ;
I’ll have some proof ; her name, that was as fresh
As Dian’s visage, is now begrim’d and black
As mine own face.—If there be cords, or knives,
Poison or fire or suffocating streams,
I’ll not endure it.—Would I were satisfied !”

Iago, resuming his former calmness at seeing Othello almost desperate, cautiously replies :

“ I see, sir, you are eaten up with passion :
I do repent me that I put it to you.”

He adds, repeating Othello’s words :

“ You would be satisfied ? ”

Othello retorts :

“ *Would* ; nay, I will,”

and Iago, now as cool as ever, replies :

“ And may ; but how ? how satisfied, my lord ?

What shall I say ? Where’s satisfaction ?

But yet I say,
If imputation and strong circumstances,—
Which lead directly to the door of truth,—
Will give you satisfaction, you may have ‘t.”

Othello, striving to be calm and truth-seeking, despite his agitation, briefly exclaims :

“ Give me a living reason she’s disloyal,’

and Iago, as if reluctantly discharging an odious duty, replies, mildly blaming his own fidelity, while inventing more falsehoods :

“ I do not like the office :
But sith I am entered in this cause so far,
Prick’d to ‘t by foolish honesty and love,—
I will go on. I lay with Cassio lately,

And being troubled with a raging tooth,
I could not sleep. . . .

In sleep I heard him say, ‘Sweet Desdemona,
Let us be wary, let us hide our loves!’
And then, sir, would he gripe and wring my hand,
Cry,—‘*O sweet creature!* . . .

. . . *Cursed fate that gave thee to the Moor!*’

Othello exclaims in rage and astonishment :

“O monstrous ! monstrous !”

and Iago quietly remarks :

“Nay, this was but his dream,”

when Othello replies :

“But this denoted a foregone conclusion,”

and Iago adds :

“And this may help to thicken other proofs,
That do demonstrate thinly.”

Othello, in a fury, exclaims wildly that he will slay his wife, when Iago, pretending to be more calm and just at perceiving the other becoming more and more furious, proceeds :

“Nay, but be wise ; yet we see nothing done ;
She may be honest yet. Tell me but this,
Have you not sometimes seen a handkerchief
Spotted with strawberries in your wife’s hand ?”

Othello at once replies :

“I gave her such a one ; ‘twas my first gift,”

and Iago says :

“ I know not that : but such a handkerchief
 (I am sure it was your wife’s) did I to-day
 See Cassio wipe his beard with ! ”

Othello, exasperated, exclaims :

“ If it be that——”

when Iago calmly finishes the sentence :

“ If it be that, or any that was hers,
 It speaks against her with the other proofs.”

Othello, now furious against Cassio, wildly exclaims :

“ O, that the slave had forty thousand lives ;
 One is too poor, too weak for my revenge ! ”

Then, apparently convinced by this story of the handkerchief, he renounces Desdemona for ever, exclaiming :

“ Now do I see ’tis true.—Look here, Iago,
 All my fond love thus do I blow to heaven.
 ’Tis gone.”

Then, turning to revenge for relief, he exclaims in raging yet fantastic words :

“ Arise, black vengeance, from thy hollow cell !
 Yield up, O love, thy crown and hearted throne,
 To tyrannous hate ! swell, bosom, with thy fraught ;
 For ’tis of aspicks’ tongues ! ”

Iago, hearing his frantic words and coolly calculating

when to speak and what to say without interrupting, waits for a pause, and then calmly observes :

“Patience, I say ; your mind perhaps may change.”

Othello's excited temper rejects the idea at once, as Iago doubtless wished and expected, and he answers fiercely :

“Never, Iago. . . .

“. . . Now by yond marble heaven,
In the due reverence of a sacred vow
I here engage my words.”

He kneels, and Iago, now convinced that Othello is thoroughly determined and needs no more persuasion, keeps up his excitement by kneeling also, and exclaiming, as if devoted to him :

“Do not rise yet :
Witness, you ever-burning lights above !
You elements that clip us round about,
Witness that here Iago doth give up
The execution of his wit, hands, heart,
To wrong'd Othello's service ! Let him command,
And to obey shall be in me remorse,
What bloody business ever.”

Othello, quite yielding to his roused passion, trusting Iago more than ever, exclaims :

“I greet thy love,
Not with vain thanks, but with acceptance bounteous,
And will upon the instant put thee to 't.
Within these three days let me hear thee say
That Cassio's not alive.”

Iago, pretending reluctance and friendship for Cassio and pity for Desdemona, replies regretfully :

“ My friend is dead ; 'tis done at your request ;
But let her live.”

Othello's fury is yet more roused at this assumed intercession, and he frantically declares she shall die, adding, as if to complete Iago's triumph :

“ Now art thou my lieutenant,”

and Iago obsequiously replies :

“ I am your own for ever.”

At this moment Iago has obtained almost complete success. His knowledge of the Moor and the able, subtle way in which he has enraged him against both Desdemona and Cassio have raised him thoroughly in Othello's favour. Yet this success by its very nature was fated to be of short duration. Iago has no proof whatever to confirm his evil insinuations, his practical triumph now depends on Othello's violence making him commit irrevocable deeds. They now depart together, when Desdemona and Emilia enter. The former, most anxious to restore Cassio to Othello's favour, asks a clown attending on the Moor, perhaps like a jester, as he shows a little of a jester's humour, where Cassio lies, meaning where he lodges ; but the man replies, as if trying to joke :

“ I know not where he lodges, and for me to devise a lodging and say he lies here, or lies there, were to lie in mine own throat.”

Desdemona says :

“Seek him, bid him come hither ; tell him I have moved my lord on his behalf and hope all will be well.”

The man promises obedience, and Desdemona mentions to Emilia the precious handkerchief which she thinks she has lost, exclaiming, while Emilia says she knows nothing of it :

“Believe me, I had rather have lost my purse
Full of crusadoes,¹ and, but my noble Moor
Is true of mind, and made of no such baseness
As jealous creatures are, it were enough
To put him to ill thinking.”

Emilia briefly asks :

“Is he not jealous ?”

and Desdemona replies, knowing Othello’s natural simplicity and generosity of mind :

“Who, he ? I think the sun where he was born
Drew all such humour from him.”

Othello now approaches, and Desdemona says :

“I will not leave him now till Cassio
Be call’d to him.”

She kindly greets Othello, who, full now of suspicion and suppressed rage, says :

“Give me your hand ; this hand is moist, my lady.”

¹ “The crusadoe was current in England at the time of Shakespeare. It was of gold and weighed two pennyweights six grains, or nine shillings English.”—Staunton’s notes.

She mildly answers:

"It yet has felt no age, nor known no sorrow."

These words indicate that she had no cause to complain of her deserted father, whom she seems never to think of, being entirely devoted to Othello. He, likely holding her hand, says in stern, vague reproach, wholly incomprehensible to her innocent mind :

"This argues fruitfulness and liberal heart."

He proceeds, more in the style of a Christian priest than of a jealous soldier :

These words completely puzzle Desdemona, who replies :

" You may indeed say so,
For 'twas that hand that gave away my heart."

Othello gloomily proceeds:

"A liberal hand : the hearts of old gave hands ;
But our new heraldry is—hands, not hearts."

Desdemona, eager to plead for Cassio and fancying that Othello is merely wandering from the subject, exclaims :

"I cannot speak of this. Come now, your promise."

meaning his declaring that he would deny her nothing, and she says she has sent for Cassio to come and speak to him.

Then the Moor asks for her handkerchief ; she gives one, but not what he meant, which she owns she has not about her. Othello, hearing this, exclaims sternly, while revealing superstitious ideas :

“ That is a fault :

That handkerchief
Did an Egyptian to my mother give :
She was a charmer¹ and could almost read
The thoughts of people ; she told her while she kept it,
‘Twould make her amiable and subdue my father
Entirely to her love, but if she lost it,
Or made a gift of it, my father’s eye
Should hold her loathly, and his spirits should hunt
After new fancies. She, dying, gave it me :
And bid me, when my fate would have me wife,
To give it her. I did so, and take heed of ‘t,
Make it a darling like your precious eye :
To lose ‘t or give ‘t away were such perdition
As nothing else could match.”

Desdemona likely never heard of the Egyptian woman before, and had little if any idea that Othello was prone to such superstitious beliefs. These he may not have learned from either Mohammedanism or Christianity, and were perhaps derived from some ancient African Paganism. Desdemona is evidently wonder-struck at his strange ideas, and asks :

“ Is ‘t possible ? ”

and Othello continues in the same singular style, which is apparently caused by early recollection, and

¹ “ Enchantress.”—Staunton’s notes.

vague ideas of his Moorish youth or childhood, likely only recalled to his mind during times of intense mental excitement. He proceeds, still dwelling on what he believed the magical handkerchief :

“ ’Tis true, there’s magic in the web of it ;
 A sibyl that had number’d in the world
 The sun to course two hundred compasses,
 In her prophetic fury sew’d the work ;
 The worms were hallow’d that did breed the silk ;
 And it was dy’d in mummy which the skilful
 Conserv’d of maidens’ hearts . . .
 . . . therefore look to ’t well.”

Desdemona, alarmed at his anxiety about the handkerchief and not knowing where it is, exclaims :

“ Then would to heaven I had never seen it.”

He replies, more suspicious :

“ Ha ! wherefore ?”

and she asks, amazed at his vehemence :

“ Why do you speak so startlingly and rash ?”

He eagerly asks :

“ Is it lost ? is ’t gone ? speak, is ’t out of the way ?”

Desdemona, astonished at such excitement, exclaims :

“ Heaven bless us ! . . . It is not lost ; but what an if it were ?”

He continues :

“ Fetch ’t, let me see it.”

Desdemona replies :

“Why, so I can, sir, but I will not now.”

Then hoping, perhaps thinking his sudden vehemence is assumed, she continues :

“This is a trick to put me from my suit :
Pray you, let Cassio be received again.”

Othello, more and more jealous, hearing this unlucky request, replies :

“Fetch me the handkerchief ; my mind misgives.”

Desdemona, longing to benefit Cassio and hardly believing Othello can be in real anger, proceeds, pleading for the former :

“Come, come,
You’ll never meet a more sufficient man.”

Othello exclaims :

“The handkerchief !”

and she rejoins :

“I pray, talk me of Cassio.”

Again Othello asks for the handkerchief, while she, pleading for Cassio at length, praises him with a generous eagerness, wholly misunderstood by the listening jealous Moor. She proceeds :

“A man that all his time,
Hath founded his good fortune on your love ;
Shar’d dangers with you.”

He again interrupts, exclaiming :

“The handkerchief,”

and Desdemona exclaims, shocked and wondering at his manner :

“In sooth, you are to blame,”

and the Moor fiercely replies :

“Away !”

and departs, leaving Desdemona alone with Emilia, who naturally asks her mistress :

“Is not this man jealous ?”

and Desdemona replies :

“I ne'er saw this before.

Sure, there's some wonder in this handkerchief :
I am most unhappy in the loss of it.”

These words indicate that Othello till now never told her about this extraordinary handkerchief, which is strange, considering its importance to his superstitious mind. Emilia, who could hardly avoid knowing her husband better than when she married him, though still quite ignorant of his real character and present designs, exclaims truly enough, as if not cheered by her experience of married life :

“ ’Tis not a year or two shows us a man :

‘ . . . Look you, Cassio, and my husband.’”

These two now enter, Iago saying to Cassio, at sight of Desdemona :

“There is no other way : 'tis she must do it.”

Then seeing her, he exclaims :

“And lo ! the happiness ! go and importune her.”

Cassio repeats his request to Desdemona for her intercession with Othello in his behalf, when she sadly answers, doubtless to his surprise :

“Alas ! thrice gentle Cassio !
My advocation is not now in tune ;
My lord is not my lord ; nor should I know him,
Were he in favour ¹ as in humour alter'd.
So help me every spirit sanctified,
As I have spoken for you all my best,
And stood within the blank of his displeasure,
For my free speech ! You must awhile be patient ;
What I can do I will, and more I will,
Than for myself I dare ; let that suffice you.”

Iago, doubtless rejoiced at what he hears, asks like one surprised :

“Is my lord angry ?”

and Emilia answers :

“He went hence but now,
And certainly in strange unquietness.”

Iago asks, recalling a terrible event, while equally trusted by Desdemona and Emilia :

“Can he be angry ? I have seen the cannon,
When it hath blown his ranks into the air,

¹ Feature.

And, like the devil, from his very arm
 Puff'd his own brother—and can he be angry?
 Something of moment then : I will go meet him ;
 There's matter in't indeed, if he be angry."

Iago departs ; nothing more is said about Othello's brother, or where the battle was where he fell, the Moor's personal history being rarely mentioned. From the first he is quite devoted to the Venetian service and surrounded entirely by Italians. He has no Moorish friends or adherents, and would likely have been thought a dangerous renegade in Mohammedan countries. He trusts no one, however, as much as he does Iago, who has long known him, though whether all he says about past events be true or not may be doubtful. Desdemona, Emilia and Cassio rely thoroughly on his honesty, and now, after he is gone, Desdemona observes, trying to explain or account for Othello's changed manner, attributing it to Italian politics or a revolt in Cyprus :

" Something, sure, of state,
 Either from Venice, or some unhatch'd practice,
 Made demonstrable here in Cyprus to him,
 Hath puddled his clear spirit, and in such cases,
 Men's natures wrangle with inferior things,
 Though great ones are their object."

She continues trying thus to excuse him to her own mind, but Emilia, perhaps older, more shrewd or observant than her gentle mistress, thoughtfully observes :

" Pray heaven, it be state matters as you think ;
 And no conception, nor no jealous toy,
 Concerning you."

Desdemona answers :

“Alas the day ! I never gave him cause.”

Emilia readily replies :

“But jealous souls will not be answered so ;
They are not ever jealous for the cause,
But jealous for they are jealous.”

Thus speaking rather like Iago, though with a very different design ; she adds :

“ ’Tis a monster,
Begot upon itself, born on itself.”

Desdemona devoutly exclaims :

“Heaven keep that monster from Othello’s mind !”

and Emilia, with deep, sincere emotion, fervently rejoins :

“Lady, amen !

Desdemona, still anxious to do something for Cassio, who has remained silent since Iago left, exclaims eager to persuade Othello again :

“I will go seek him. Cassio, walk hereabout ;
If I do find him fit, I’ll move your suit,
And seek to effect it to my uttermost.”

Cassio replies with sincere gratitude :

“I humbly thank your ladyship.”

Desdemona and Emilia depart together, and Cassio’s

Venetian lover, Bianca, enters. Though she loves him, he apparently cares less for her, as she exclaims reproachfully :

“ What ! keep a week away ? seven days and nights ?
 Eight score eight hours ? and lovers’ absent hours,
 More tedious than the dial eight score times ?
 O weary reckoning ! ”

Cassio excuses himself, faintly alluding to his disgrace with Othello without mentioning it :

“ Pardon me, Bianca,
 I have this while with leaden thoughts been press’d ; ”

and gives her Desdemona’s handkerchief, saying :

“ Sweet Bianca,
 Take me this work out.”

Bianca becomes jealous immediately, thinking that Cassio has another lover, and angrily asks :

“ O Cassio, whence came this ?
 This is some token from a newer friend.
 To the felt absence now I feel a cause :
 Is it come to this ? Well, well.”

Cassio contradicts her, saying truly that he found it in his room, Iago doubtless having put it there, as he had intended, and has no idea to whom it belongs. He adds to Bianca :

“ I like the work well ; ere it be demanded,
 As like enough it will, I’d have it copied :
 Take it and do ’t ; and leave me for this time.”

Bianca asks :

“ Leave you ? Wherfore ? ”

Cassio replies :

“ I do attend here on the general ;

Not that I love you not ” ;

and she, evidently in a fallen, friendless position, meekly replies :

“ 'Tis very good. I must be circumstanced, ”

and they depart. Cassio is apparently ashamed of this woman, who has followed him from Venice to Cyprus, and seems unknown to all but himself and Iago, who knows all around him.

The next act and scene describe Othello and Iago alone together, talking over the one terrible subject. Iago at first pretends to have some doubt as to Desdemona's infidelity, and rather pleads for her, but when he alludes a second time to the missing handkerchief, Othello passionately exclaims :

“ By heaven, I would most gladly have forgot it ;
Thou saidst—O it comes o'er my memory,
As doth the raven o'er the infectious house,
Boding to all—he had my handkerchief.”

Iago proceeds to say that Cassio has owned confidentially his intimacy with Desdemona, and at this news, which Iago delivers with his usual extraordinary artfulness, the violence of Othello's temper overcomes

him completely. He has hitherto thoroughly trusted Iago, and has had apparently no discovered reason to think his confidence misplaced. Iago steadily persists, therefore, in his story about the precious lost handkerchief. On this subject the Moor has admitted having strange superstitious fancies, and now the alleged confession of Cassio produces the mental effect on Othello which Iago had desired and probably expected. Uttering incoherent words of rage, suspicion, and confused excitement, the brave Othello falls senseless in a trance before his evil genius, who, with the calm, consistent triumph of a successful operator, exclaims in self-congratulation :

“Work on,
My medicine, work ! Thus credulous fools are caught ;
And many worthy and chaste dames even thus,
All guiltless, meet reproach.”

Then, trying to rouse the victim of his deceit, Iago exclaims :

“What, ho, my lord ! My lord, I say ! Othello !”

Cassio now enters, and Iago declares Othello has fallen into an epilepsy, having had one the previous day ; Cassio in real sympathy exclaims :

“Rub him about the temples,”

but Iago, wishing Cassio away, replies :

“No, forbear ;
The lethargy must have its quiet course.

. Look, he stirs,
Do you withdraw yourself a little while,

He will recover straight ; when he is gone,
I would on great occasion speak with you.”

Cassio, who, like all the rest in this play, trusts Iago completely, withdraws at once, and Iago, as Othello recovers from his fit, asks how he is, in apparent sympathy. The Moor almost immediately reverts to his troubles, and asks, alluding to Cassio :

“Did he confess it ?”

and Iago replies :

“Good sir, be a man.”

Then, pretending to console him by declaring his great cause of jealousy to be a very common one, and that millions of married people are faithless to each other in secret, he adds practically :

“Stand you awhile apart ;
Confine yourself but in a patient list.
Whilst you were here, o'erwhelmed with your grief,
A passion most unsuiting such a man,
Cassio came hither : I shifted him away
And laid good 'scuse upon your ecstasy ;
Bade him anon return and here speak with me ;
The which he promis'd. Do but encave yourself,
And mark the fleers, the gibes and notable scorns,
That dwell in every region of his face ;
For I will make him tell the tale anew.

I say, but mark his gesture. Marry, patience ;
Or I shall say you are all-in-all in spleen,
And nothing of a man.”

Othello listens with enforced patience and ill-suppressed rage, as Iago desires, and replies :

“ Dost thou hear, Iago ?
 I will be found most cunning in my patience ;
 But—dost thou hear ?—most bloody.”

Iago, secretly gratified, replies :

“ That’s not amiss ;
 But yet keep time in all. Will you withdraw ? ”

Othello, always taking his advice, retires accordingly, when Iago reveals to himself his secret plans, in which his accurate knowledge of all he is now dealing with is only too evident.

“ Now will I question Cassio of Bianca.

• . . . It is a creature,
 That dotes on Cassio :

• . . . He when he hears of her cannot restrain
 From the excess of laughter !—here he comes !—
 As he shall smile, Othello shall go mad ;
 And his unbookish ¹ jealousy must construe
 Poor Cassio’s smiles, gestures, and light behaviour,
 Quite in the wrong.”

Cassio enters, and Iago purposely asks :

“ How do you now, lieutenant ? ”

which name depresses the poor, degraded officer, though always believing Iago to be his friend. He replies, in dejection highly amusing to the other :

“ The worser that you give me the addition,
 Whose want even kills me.”

¹ “ Ignorant.”—Staunton’s notes.

Iago replies :

“ Ply Desdemona well, and you are sure of 't.
Now if this suit lay in Bianca's dower,
How quickly shall you speed ? ”

He is here supposed to lower his voice, according to a brief direction in the text ; yet this passage seems most important in the tragedy. Iago's own safety must surely depend entirely on Cassio's not naming Bianca, lest Othello should hear it in their private talk. Cassio's not naming her is surely a mere chance : if once he had, Othello's roused fury would immediately have been diverted from Desdemona and Cassio. A man of Iago's shrewdness would scarcely have staked all his hopes of success on such a doubtful chance as that of Bianca not being actually named, while spoken about. Yet the dangerous conversation between the knave and his new dupe continues just as Iago wishes, for Cassio, hearing Bianca's name, which Othello, of course, never catches, though listening, immediately laughs, exclaiming, in contemptuous pity for his despised mistress :

“ Alas, poor caitiff ! ”

while the Moor exclaims to himself :

“ Look how he laughs already,”

while Iago quickly proceeds, referring to Bianca :

“ I never knew woman love man so,”

and Cassio rejoins :

“Alas! poor rogue, I think i’ faith she loves me.”

Othello exclaims to himself, closely observing Cassio and partly hearing his words, during this trying scene :

“Now he denies it faintly and laughs it out.”

Iago, wishing Othello to hear, says evidently louder :

“Do you hear, Cassio?”

Othello, understanding this, says aside :

“Now he importunes him
To tell it o’er: go to; well said, well said.”

Iago continues, addressing Cassio :

“She gives it out that you shall marry her.
Do you intend it?”

Cassio only laughs at the question, and Othello, forgetting or not knowing Cassio is a Florentine, mutters :

“Do you triumph, Roman? do you triumph?”

and Cassio, thinking he is only joking with Iago about Bianca, laughingly retorts :

“I marry her! . . . Prythee bear some charity to my wit,”

and laughs again; while Othello, hinting at future danger, exclaims aside :

“So, so, so—they laugh that win,”

and Iago proceeds, tempting Cassio to say more :

“Faith, the cry goes, that you shall marry her.”

Cassio cannot believe this, though trusting Iago, and alluding to Bianca says :

“This is the monkey’s own giving out ; she is persuaded I will marry her out of her own love and flattery, not out of my promise.”

Iago, who really directs Cassio’s revelation, makes a sign to Othello to hear particularly what is now coming, as the Moor says aside :

“Iago beckons me ; now he begins the story,”

while Cassio proceeds to describe Bianca’s unwelcome attentions :

“She was here even now ; she haunts me in every place. I was the other day talking on the sea-bank with certain Venetians, and thither comes the bauble, and falls me thus about the neck.”

Othello here says to himself, observing Cassio’s gesture, and hardly guessing his words :

“*Crying*, O dear Cassio ! as it were : his gesture imports it.”

Cassio proceeds, still laughing at recollections :

“So hangs, and lolls and weeps upon me ; so hales and pulls me : ha, ha, ha !”

Othello, guessing as well as closely watching, says again to himself :

“Now he tells how she plucked him to my chamber. O, I see that nose of yours, but not that dog I shall throw it to.”

Bianca herself now approaches ; Cassio asks why she still haunts him, and she irritably mentions the handkerchief which she has with her, asking :

“ What did you mean by that same handkerchief you gave me even now ? I was a fine fool to take it. . . . A likely piece of work that you should find it in your chamber and not know who left it there ! This is some minx’s token, I must take out the work. There, give it your hobby-horse wheresoever you had it, I’ll take out no work on ‘t.”

Cassio exclaims :

“ How now, sweet Bianca ? ”

seeming surprised at her petulance, and Othello exclaims to himself again :

“ By heaven, that should be my handkerchief,”

while Bianca, still offended, says to Cassio :

“ If you come to supper to-night, you may ; if you will not, come when you are next prepared for,”

and departs. Iago exclaims :

“ After her, after her ! ”

and Cassio replies :

“ Faith, I must ; she’ll rail in the streets else,”

and replying to Iago, adds he will sup there, when Iago says :

“ Well, I may chance to see you, for I would very fain speak with you,”

and Cassio cordially rejoins :

“ Prithee, come ; will you ? ”

when the other says :

“ Go to ; say no more, ”

and Cassio departs, evidently believing Iago to be as much his friend as ever. Othello then, bursting with rage against Cassio, exclaims :

“ How shall I murder him, Iago ? ”

This savage question Iago does not immediately answer, but continues to provoke Othello yet more by asking if he saw the handkerchief, when Othello asks :

“ Was that mine ? ”

and Iago replies :

“ Yours by this hand, and to see how he prizes the foolish woman your wife ! ”

adding that Desdemona gave the precious article to Cassio, who, in his turn, gave it to Bianca. Othello is now thoroughly enraged with both his wife and Cassio, yet cannot help recalling Desdemona’s beauty and attractions, when Iago practically remarks :

“ Nay, you must forget that, ”

and Othello wildly proceeds :

“ Ay, let her perish, . . . for she shall not live ; no, my heart is turned to stone ; I strike it and it hurts my hand. ”

Then, Desdemona's sweet image again returning to his frantic mind, he exclaims mournfully :

“O the world hath not a sweeter creature ; she might lie by an emperor's side and command him tasks.”

Again Iago calmly interposes to stop these regrets, observing :

“Nay, that's not your way,”

while Othello rejoins, still unable to cease praising her in the midst of his rage, and even recalling her accomplishments :

“Hang her ! I do but say what she is—so delicate with her needle ! —an admirable musician ! O, she will sing the savageness out of a bear ! Of so high and plenteous wit and invention ! ”

Iago, insinuating that all her charms, graces, and talents are for other men, rather than for her husband, quietly remarks :

“She's the worse for all this,”

and Othello, the more incensed, as he wished, assents, exclaiming :

“O, a thousand, thousand times—and then, of so gentle a condition.”

Iago sarcastically catches at the word, observing :

“Ay, too gentle,”

and Othello assents, exclaiming, evidently nearly as grieved as enraged :

“Nay, that's certain ; but yet the pity of it, Iago !—O Iago, the pity of it, Iago !”

The latter now thinks it high time to put a complete stop to these regrets, and does so with malignant cunning by emphatically remarking :

“If you are so fond over her iniquity, give her patent to offend, for if it touches not you, it comes near nobody.”

This reminder again turns Othello’s pity to rage, and when Iago exclaims :

“O, ‘tis foul in her !”

he rejoins :

“With mine officer,”

feeling it particularly disgraceful that his subordinate should now become his wife’s lover ; and when Iago adds :

“That’s fouler,”

he resolves to poison Desdemona ; when Iago suggests her strangulation :

“in her bed, even the bed she hath contaminated,”

and the Moor furiously exclaims :

“Good, good ; the justice of it pleases,”

while Iago says :

“And for Cassio, let me be his undertaker ; you shall hear more by midnight.”

While they are thus plotting a trumpet is heard,

which, Iago says, means news from Venice, and Desdemona enters, accompanied by her relative Lodovico, who brings news or despatches from Venice for Othello to read. As they greet each other, Desdemona says to Lodovico, who has inquired after "Lieutenant Cassio" :

"Cousin, there's fallen between him and my lord
An unkind breach, but you shall make all well."

Iago grimly replies :

"Lives, sir,"

to Lodovico, asking for Cassio, but no one guesses or inquires into his meaning, known only to the Moor. Othello, now distracted between public duty and private trouble, hearing Desdemona's words, asks her distrustfully :

"Are you sure of that?"

and proceeds, or rather tries, to read the Venetian despatches, when Lodovico asking if there is a dispute between Othello and Cassio, Desdemona replies :

"A most unhappy one; I would do much
To atone them for the love I bear to Cassio."

These unfortunate words make Othello, in a fury, exclaim, while seeming to read the news :

"Fire and brimstone!"

and to ask her :

"Are you wise?"

Desdemona naturally exclaims to all around :

“What, is he angry?”

when Lodovico, also wondering at Othello’s manner, suggests :

“ Maybe the letter mov’d him ;
For as I think they do command him home,
Deputing Cassio in his government.”

This change is not made apparently from any offence Othello has given to the Venetian State, though its true reason is not mentioned. Desdemona, however, for some unexplained reason, unless she wishes to return to Italy, joyfully exclaims :

“ Trust me, I am glad on’t,”

and thus confirms Othello’s jealousy, who exclaims first :

“Indeed,”

and then :

“ I am glad to see you mad.”

She asks him in wonder :

“ Why, sweet Othello ? ”

and he then actually strikes her, to the amazement of all, Lodovico exclaiming indignantly :

“ My lord, this would not be believed in Venice,
Though I should swear I saw it : ‘tis very much ;
Make her amends ; she weeps.”

Othello frantically exclaims, like one out of his senses :

“ O devil, devil !
If that the earth could teem with woman’s tears,
Each drop she falls would prove a crocodile ;
Out of my sight ! ”

She meekly replies :

“ I will not stay to offend you, ”

and is leaving, when Lodovico exclaims :

“ Truly an obedient lady,—
I do beseech your lordship, call her back.”

The Moor does so, and cannot conceal his confused mind from the wonder of all present except Iago. Divided between his public duties at Venice and his suspicions of Desdemona, Othello, unable, yet striving to conceal his agitation, asks Lodovico :

“ What would you with her, sir ? ”

and he, amazed, asks in return :

“ Who, I, my lord ? ”

and Othello says, becoming more and more distracted :

“ Ay, you did wish that I would make her turn.”

He proceeds to address Lodovico and Desdemona alternately :

“ Sir, she can turn and turn, and yet go on,
And turn again ; and she can weep, sir, weep !
And she’s obedient, as you say—obedient !—
Very obedient. Proceed you in your tears.”

Then he says to Lodovico :

“Concerning this, sir,”

and again to Desdemona :

“O well painted passion !
I am commanded home ; get you away,
I'll send for you anon. Sir, I obey the mandate,
And will return to Venice. Hence, avaunt !”

Desdemona departs, and the Moor continues :

“Cassio shall have my place. And, sir, to-night
I do entreat that we may sup together.
You are welcome, sir, to Cyprus. Goats and monkeys !”

He departs in evident wild excitement, and Lodovico, astounded at his words and manner, asks Iago :

“Is this the noble Moor whom our full Senate
Call all-in-all sufficient ? Is this the nature
Whom passion could not shake ? whose solid virtue
The shot of accident, nor dart of chance,
Could neither graze nor pierce !”

Iago drily replies :

“He is much chang'd,”

and Lodovico proceeds :

“Are his wits safe ? is he not light of brain ?”

and Iago replies, in assumed confusion and sorrow :

“He's—that he is ; I may not breathe my censure.
What he might be—if what he might, he is not,—
I would to heaven he were !”

Lodovico, shocked at recalling Othello's violence, exclaims :

“ What, strike his wife ! ”

Iago, pretending sympathy with Lodovico's feelings, replies :

“ Faith, that was not so well ; yet would I knew
That stroke would prove the worst.”

Lodovico, unable to comprehend all he has seen and heard, again asks :

“ Is it his use ?
Or did the letters work upon his blood,
And new create this fault ? ”

Iago replies, with apparent deep and hopeless regret :

“ Alas ! alas !
It is not honesty in me to speak
What I have seen and known. You shall observe him ;
And his own courses will denote him so,
That I may save my speech ; do but go after,
And mark how he continues.”

Lodovico, apparently a man of good sense and right feeling, exclaims gravely, reflecting on Othello :

“ I am sorry that I am deceiv'd in him.”

In the next scene Othello and Emilia enter together. The former inquires about Desdemona's alleged love for Cassio, which Emilia does not believe, and anxiously asks :

“ What, did they never whisper ? ”

Emilia replies :

“Never.”

Othello again asks :

“Nor send you out of the way?”

Emilia repeats :

“Never,”

and the Moor asks :

“To fetch her fan, her gloves, her work, nor nothing?”

A third time Emilia repeats the solemn word

“Never,”

which induces him to exclaim :

“That’s strange!”

and Emilia, trustful and thoroughly attached to her suspected mistress, proceeds :

“I durst, my lord, to wager she is honest,
Lay down my soul at stake : if you think other,
Remove your thought ; it doth abuse your bosom.”

Eager in Desdemona’s vindication and knowing nothing of Iago’s villainy, this faithful servant continues :

“If any wretch hath put this in your head,
Let heaven requite it with the serpent’s curse !
For if she be not honest, chaste, and true,
There’s no man happy.”

The Moor, unmoved by Emilia’s honesty and completely relying on Iago, tells her to go and send

Desdemona to him ; she leaves, and when alone, Othello says to himself in bitter words :

“ She says enough ; yet she’s a simple bawd
That cannot say as much,”

intimating distrust of both these women, yet knowing nothing for certain against either.

Desdemona then comes, accompanied by Emilia, when he exclaims to his wife :

“ Let me see your eyes ;
Look in my face.”

Desdemona, wondering at what seems his strange passion, asks :

“ What horrible fancy is this ? ”

Othello, who appears to have vague suspicions of Emilia also, tells her to go, saying in bitter taunt :

“ Shut the door ;
Cough or cry *hem* if anybody come ;
Your mystery, your mystery—nay, despatch.”

Emilia, without a word, departs ; while Desdemona, kneeling, entreats him to say what he means. Othello fiercely denounces her as false to him, while she vainly defends herself ; and the distracted Moor, now shedding tears, seems struggling between grief and anger, exclaiming :

“ Ah ! Desdemona !—away ! away ! away ! ”

She asks in terrified astonishment :

“Why do you weep ?
Am I the motive of these tears, my lord ?”

Then, imagining that he may think her father is intriguing against him in Venice, she proceeds, quite mistaken :

“If haply you my father suspect,
An instrument of this your calling back,
Lay not your blame on me ; if you have lost him,
Why, I have lost him too.”

At this trying moment she thus recalls the image of her absent father, who had so vehemently opposed her unfortunate marriage, and to whom she can no longer appeal. Her words produce no effect on Othello, who, thoroughly jealous now, in real mental distress utters a strange, eloquent lamentation, in mingled sorrow and dangerous anger :

“Had it pleased heaven
To try me with affliction . . .

Steep’d me in poverty to the very lips,
Given to captivity me and my utmost hopes,
I should have found in some place of my soul
A drop of patience ; but, alas ! to make me
A fixed figure of the time for Scorn
To point his slow unmoving finger at !
Yet I could bear that too ; well, very well.”

Then, reverting vehemently to his supposed injury :

“But there, where I have garner’d up my heart,
Where either I must live, or bear no life,
The fountain from the which my current runs
Or else dries up ; to be discarded thence !”

He proceeds in more wild, reproachful language, and Desdemona for the first time thinks that he suspects her, and exclaims in apprehensive doubt or wonder :

“ I hope my noble lord esteems me honest.”

The Moor answers in bitter sarcasm, intimating utter distrust of her, and proceeds in deep reproach :

“ O thou weed,
Who art so lovely fair and smell’st so sweet
That the sense aches at thee—would thou hadst ne’er been born ! ”

Dismayed and shocked, she can only ask :

“ Alas ! what ignorant sin have I committed ? ”

Othello, catching at this last word, and lashing himself up into fury, accuses her vehemently of what he suspects, when she is roused into exclaiming indignantly :

“ By heaven, you do me wrong.”

But nothing she can say avails her, and the Moor continues his reproaches, when Emilia re-enters, to whom he says in mysterious language, suspecting and astonishing both :

“ We have done our course ; there’s money for your pains.
I pray you turn the key and keep our counsel,”

and departs in confused rage. Emilia then exclaims :

“ Alas ! what does this gentleman conceive ?
How do you, madam ? how do you, my good lady ? ”

Desdemona, apparently confused or stupefied by

Othello’s vehemence, which she cannot understand, and which is so different from his former manner, replies wearily :

“ Faith, half asleep.”

Emilia asks :

“ Good madam, what’s the matter with my lord ? ”

The other asks :

“ Who is thy lord ? ”

and Emilia replies :

“ He that is yours, sweet lady.”

Desdemona sadly replies :

“ I have none : do not talk to me, Emilia ;
I cannot weep ; nor answer have I none,
But what should go by water.”

Then, recalling the early days of her unhappy marriage, she says :

“ Prythee, to-night
Lay on my bed my wedding sheets, remember—
And call thy husband hither.”

Emilia exclaims, likely to herself, as if remembering her mistress’s wedding :

“ Here’s a change indeed,”

and departs, while Desdemona exclaims to herself, perhaps remembering her distressed father, or her

rejected lover, Roderigo, though she names neither of the two who certainly loved her sincerely :

“ ‘Tis meet I should be us’d so, very meet.”

Emilia re-enters with Iago, who asks her what she wishes and how she is. Desdemona replies, alluding to the Moor’s anger with her :

“ I cannot tell. Those that do teach young babes,
Do it with gentle means and easy tasks ;
He might have chid me so ; for in good faith
I am a child to chiding.”

This admission again implies that Brabantio had always been a kind rather than a stern father, and that her experience of him was very different from that of Cordelia, patiently enduring the occasional, if not frequent, wrath of her passionate father, King Lear. Yet it is not till Desdemona sees Othello in a fury with her that she recalls the indulgence of her deserted parent, and the general kindness of all she had apparently known in early life. Iago again asks what is the matter, and Emilia, never suspecting that he is the sole cause of all the mischief, warmly exclaims :

“ Alas, Iago, my lord hath . . .
Thrown such despite and heavy terms upon her
As true hearts cannot bear.”

Iago, pretending to sympathise, asks :

“ Why did he so ?”

and proceeds :

“ Do not weep, do not weep ; alas the day !”

Whether Iago here means to regret Desdemona's marriage does not seem clear, yet his words evidently encourage Emilia to nobly resent her mistress's treatment, as she warmly exclaims, recalling Desdemona's early history and social position in Venice, yet never naming Roderigo as among former lovers :

“ Hath she forsook so many noble matches,
Her father, and her country, and her friends ? ”

Then, recalling Othello's abusive words, adds :

“ Would it not make one weep ? ”

Iago inquires as to the Moor's behaviour :

“ How comes this trick upon him ? ”

Desdemona can only exclaim :

“ Nay, heaven doth know,”

and Emilia, never guessing that she is condemning her husband alone, indignantly proceeds :

“ I will be hang'd if some eternal villain,
Some busy and insinuating rogue,
Some cogging, cozening slave, to get some office,
Have not devis'd this slander, I'll be hanged else.”

Iago, naturally wishing to silence her, and perhaps taken by surprise at the boldness of her indignation, exclaims :

“ Fie ! there is no such man ; it is impossible.”

Desdemona, though never suspecting that the real

villain is beside her, nobly exclaims, in a truly devout spirit, worthy of her gentle, forgiving nature :

“ If any such there be, heaven pardon him.”

Emilia, whose indignation is thoroughly aroused, rejoins :

“ A halter pardon him !”

but neither she nor her mistress entertains the faintest suspicion of Iago. His wife proceeds, in honest anger in behalf of her ill-used mistress :

“ The Moor’s abus’d by some most villainous knave,
Some base, notorious knave, some scurvy fellow ;
O heaven ! that such companions¹ thou’dst unfold,
And put in every honest hand a whip
To lash the rascal naked through the world,
Even from the east to the west !”

Iago, again trying to silence her, exclaims :

“ Speak within door,”

but she, unheeding him, boldly continues in the same strain of eager denunciation :

“ Oh, fie upon them !”

Then aside to Iago she adds, probably with bitter personal experience of the consequences of slander:

“ Some such squire he was
That turned your wit the seamy side without,
And made you to suspect me with the Moor.”

¹ “ ‘Companion’ was often used in Shakespeare’s time as a term of contempt.”—Staunton’s notes.

Iago, always distrusting, yet unable to silence her in Desdemona's presence, replies with suppressed anger, probably unheard by Desdemona :

“ You are a fool ; go to,”

and Desdemona asks him :

“ Alas ! Iago,
What shall I do to win my lord again ?
Good friend, go to him ; for by this light of heaven
I know not how I lost him. Here I kneel—
If e'er my guilt did trespass 'gainst his love,
Either in discourse of thought or actual deed ;
Or that mine eyes, mine ears, or any sense
Delighted them in any other form . . .

Comfort forswear me ! Unkindness may do much,
And his unkindness may defeat my life,
But never taint my love.”

Iago tries to soothe her in calm words, which apparently, or to some extent, convince both Desdemona and Emilia :

“ I pray you, be content ; 'tis but his humour :
The business of the State does him offence,
And he does chide with you.”

Trumpets here sound, when Iago exclaims :

“ Hark, how these instruments summon to supper !
The messengers of Venice stay the meat.
Go in and weep not, all things shall be well.”

The two ladies depart, both, likely, trying to believe him, and Roderigo now enters and confronts Iago alone. This lovesick dupe has begun to suspect

that he is not fairly dealt with—that Iago has obtained his money or jewels by false pretences ; and, though easily deceived, is evidently no coward. He angrily exclaims :

“ Every day thou daffest me with some device, Iago. . . . I will indeed no longer endure it ”;

and truly enough proceeds in his complaints :

“ Your words and performances are no kin together. . . I have wasted myself out of my means. The jewels you have had from me to deliver to Desdemona would half have corrupted a votarist ; you have told me she hath received them and returned me expectations and comforts of sudden respect and acquaintance, but I find none.”

Iago tries to quiet or satisfy him, and repeats :

“ Very well ”

twice, when Roderigo angrily retorts :

“ I tell you, 'tis not *verv well*.”

Then, becoming more practical and spirited, though only for a short time, he boldly proceeds :

“ I will make myself known to Desdemona ; if she will return me my jewels, I will give over my suit and repent my unlawful solicitation ; if not, assure yourself I will seek satisfaction of you.”

He may touch the hilt of his sword here, for Iago, evidently seeing it is time now to satisfy him, if possible, and wishing to avoid the threatened duel, replies with assumed cordiality :

“Why, now I see there’s mettle in thee, and even from this instant do build on thee a better opinion than ever before. Give me thy hand, Roderigo; thou hast taken against me a most just exception, but I protest I have dealt most directly in thy affair.”

Roderigo rather distrustfully replies :

“It hath not appeared”;

and Iago, with apparent frankness, admits—

“I grant indeed it hath not appeared, and your suspicion is not without wit and judgment. But, Roderigo, if thou hast that in thee indeed which I have greater reason to believe now than ever—I mean purpose, courage, and valour—this night show it.”

He then promises Roderigo that to-morrow night he will obtain Desdemona, earnestly exclaiming that if he does not :

“take me from this world with treachery and devise engines for my life.”

Roderigo, still rather uneasy, asks :

“Well, what is it? is it within reason and compass?”

and his tempter rejoins with some important intelligence :

“Sir, there is especial commission come from Venice to depute Cassio in Othello’s place.”

Roderigo asks if Othello and Desdemona will then return to Venice; Iago replies that they are going to Mauritania, unless they may be accidentally detained in Cyprus, adding :

“wherein none can be so determinate as the removing of Cassio.”

Roderigo, more sentimental or fiery than intelligent, asks :

“ How do you mean, removing him ? ”

And Iago briefly, yet decidedly, replies :

“ Why, by making him uncapable of Othello’s place ; knocking out his brains.”

Roderigo asks again :

“ And that you would have me to do ? ”

and the other resolutely replies :

“ Ay, if you dare do yourself a profit and a right.”

He then says that Cassio is to sup this night with his mistress, meaning Bianca ; that he does not yet know of his recent appointment as Governor of Cyprus, but that he will arrange for Cassio’s leaving the place where he sups between twelve and one o’clock, adding murderous directions :

“ You may take him at your pleasure ; I will be near to second your attempt, and he shall fall between us.”

Then, evidently perceiving Roderigo’s reluctance or hesitation to commit this crime, he proceeds :

“ Come, stand not amazed at it, but go along with me ; I will show you such a necessity in his death that you shall think yourself bound to put it on him. It is now high supper-time, and the night grows to waste ; about it.”

Roderigo, still rather hesitating, though under Iago's influence, exclaims doubtfully :

“I will hear further reason for this,”

and Iago replies :

“And you shall be satisfied.”

The next scene introduces Othello, Desdemona, Emilia, Lodovico, and attendants. Lodovico, perhaps seeing that Othello looks ill, fatigued, or agitated, says to him :

“I do beseech you, sir, trouble yourself no further”;

and Othello answers :

“O, pardon me, 'twill do me good to walk.”

A few civil words pass between Desdemona and Lodovico, and Othello then sternly tells her to retire to bed at once, to dismiss Emilia, and he will soon be with her. He, Lodovico, and attendants depart, leaving Desdemona and Emilia alone ; the latter then asks, referring to the Moor :

“How goes it now ? he looks gentler than he did ?”

and Desdemona answers :

“He says he will return incontinent . . .
And bade me to dismiss you”;

and Emilia exclaims :

“Dismiss me !”

but Desdemona proceeds quietly :

“ It was his bidding ; therefore, good Emilia,
Give me my nightly wearing and adieu.
We must not now displease him.”

Emilia, now evidently full of alarm, exclaims earnestly :

“ I would you had never seen him ” ;

and Desdemona replies :

“ So would not I ; my love doth so approve him,
That even his stubbornness, his checks, and frowns—
Pr'ythee unpin me—have grace and favour in them.”

Yet, despite her love, she vaguely apprehends danger from him, and she recalls the words of a sad old song, which she now repeats to her faithful attendant ;

“ My mother had a maid call'd Barbara :
She was in love and he she lov'd prov'd mad,
And did forsake her ; she had a song of *Willow*,
An old thing 'twas, but it express'd her fortune,
And she died singing it : that song to-night
Will not go from my mind.”

Perhaps from these words Desdemona imagines Othello may be also going out of his mind, as she cannot explain or understand his altered conduct, and if so, her own present position would somewhat resemble that of Barbara. As if at length trying to divert her sad thoughts, she praises her cousin Lodovico's personal appearance and exclaims :

“ This Lodovico is a proper man.”

Emilia assents, replying :

“A very handsome man,”

and Desdemona briefly rejoins :

“He speaks well,”

while Emilia, perhaps to amuse her poor mistress, observes :

“I know a lady in Venice would have walked barefoot to Palestine for a touch of his nether lip,”

and Desdemona begins to sing the pathetic song she had mentioned :

“The poor soul sat sighing by a sycamore tree,
 Sing all a green willow;
Her hand on her bosom, her head on her knee,
 Sing willow, willow, willow;
The fresh streams ran by her and murmur’d her moans,
 Sing willow, willow, willow;
Her salt tears fell from her and soften’d the stones,
 Sing willow, willow, willow.”

During this melancholy ditty she is being undressed, and fancies she hears a knock, but no one enters, and she proceeds to ask Emilia if she believes that there are any wives who would deceive their husbands as she is accused of doing. Emilia, in somewhat free language, a contrast to the modest delicacy of Desdemona, lays equal if not more blame on faithless husbands, as a rule, and says, concluding a strange, sad dialogue :

“But I do think it is their husbands’ faults,
If wives do fall : say that they slack their duties. . .

Or else break out in peevish jealousies,
Throwing restraint upon us ; or, say they strike us,
Or scant our former having in despite :

Yet have we some revenge. Let husbands know
Their wives have sense like them . . .

Then let them use us well ; else let them know
The ills we do, their ills instruct us so."

These words seem rather like those of Shylock
about Jewish ill-usage by Christians.¹

Desdemona answers them in two noble lines worthy
of herself, which end this act and scene :

"Good night, good night ; heaven me such uses send,
Not to pick bad from bad, but by bad mend."

The next and last act is tragic throughout. Iago
and Roderigo appear together in a street, the latter
being now persuaded to attack Cassio, while Iago
gives directions, saying :

"Here stand behind this bulk, straight will he come ;
Wear thy good rapier bare, and put it home :
Quick, quick ; I'll be at thy elbow."

Then, knowing Roderigo's reluctance or indecision, he
adds :

"It makes us or it mars us, think on that,
And fix most firm thy resolution."

¹ "If a Jew wrong a Christian, what's his humility ? Revenge.
If a Christian wrong a Jew, what should his sufferance be by Christian example ? Why revenge. The villainy you teach me I will execute, and it shall go hard but I will better the instruction."—*"Merchant of Venice,"* Act III., Scene 1.

Roderigo, still somewhat irresolute, replies :

“Be near at hand, I may miscarry in ‘t,”

and Iago rejoins, trying to encourage him :

“Here at thy hand ; be bold and take thy stand.”

Iago retires a little distance, and Roderigo, when alone, reveals his reluctant, yet excited state of mind :

“I have no great devotion to the deed ;
And yet he hath given me satisfying reasons.”

These words show that Iago has quite convinced him that Cassio is his rival in Desdemona’s love, and Roderigo adds desperately :

“ ‘Tis but a man gone,—forth, my sword ; he dies.”

Iago also now says to himself, with his usual contempt for Roderigo :

“I have rubb’d this young quat almost to the sense,¹
And he grows angry.”

Then, carefully reviewing the position of his three dupes towards himself, he adds :

“Now whether he kills Cassio,
Or Cassio him, or each do kill the other,
Every way makes my gain ; live Roderigo,
He calls me to a restitution large
Of gold and jewels that I bobb’d from him,
As gifts to Desdemona ;

¹ “I have rubbed this pimple to the quick.”—Staunton’s notes.

It must not be; if Cassio do remain,
 He hath a daily beauty in his life
 That makes me ugly, and besides the Moor
 May unfold me to him; there stand I in much peril:
 No, he must die."

Cassio now enters, and Roderigo immediately attacks him, exclaiming :

"Villain! thou diest,"

when Cassio, evidently unhurt, exclaims :

"That thrust had been mine enemy indeed,
 But that my coat is better than thou know'st;
 I will make proof of thine."

He wounds Roderigo without recognising him. Iago then rushes forwards, wounds Cassio, and vanishes. The wounded men, apparently now both helpless, exclaim :

"RODERIGO. O, I am slain!
 CASSIO. I am maim'd for ever: Help, ho! murder!"

Cassio falls. Othello now appears at a distance from the fray, and hearing the shouts of Cassio, exclaims :

"The voice of Cassio! Iago keeps his word."

The wounded Roderigo exclaims, repenting his attack on Cassio :

"O villain that I am!"

Othello, perhaps thinking it the same voice, as both men are wounded and helpless, exclaims :

"'Tis even so,"

while Cassio continues to call for a light and a surgeon, and Othello, hearing him, again exclaims, as if his anger was gratified :

“ ‘Tis he : O brave Iago, honest and just,
That hast such a noble sense of thy friend’s wrong !
Thou teachest me.”

Then, referring to Desdemona, he exclaims :

“ Minion, your dear lies dead,
And your unblest fate hies ”;

and with fiery words threatening death to his wife he departs, while the Venetians, Lodovico and Gratiano, enter together; the latter, though Brabantio’s brother, has apparently no prejudice against the Moor. They now hear and wonder at the sighs and moans of the two wounded men in the dark, when Iago re-enters with a light, asking :

“ Did you not hear a cry ? ”

and Cassio exclaims again :

“ Here, here, for heaven’s sake, help me.”

Gratiano does not know Iago, but Lodovico tells him he is the Moor’s ensign and a

“ very valiant fellow,”

while Cassio, little knowing the truth, calls to Iago as if to a friend :

“ Iago ! O, I am spoil’d, undone by villains !
Give me some help ”;

and Iago replies, as if astonished :

“ O me, lieutenant ! what villains have done this ? ”

and Cassio answers, having heard Roderigo’s voice :

“ I think there is one of them hereabout,
And cannot make away.”

Then Iago, calling on Lodovico and Gratiano to assist him, exclaims :

“ O treacherous villains ! ”

The unlucky Roderigo also calls for assistance, being as helpless as Cassio ; and, at hearing his voice, Iago exclaims :

“ That’s one of them,”

and stabs Roderigo, who, recognising him, is just able to reproach him by name, exclaiming :

“ O d—ned Iago, O inhuman dog ! ”

but is mortally wounded. Iago then addresses Gratiano and Lodovico :

“ What may you be ? ”

Lodovico replies :

“ As you shall prove us, praise us.”

Iago recognises his voice and shows him Cassio wounded and helpless, when Bianca enters and immediately mourns over her beloved Cassio. Iago

then, apparently thinking that anything will be believed against one in her friendless, degraded position, insinuates that she was a party to this injury, and recognising Roderigo, exclaims :

“Lend me a light. Know we this face or no ?
Alas ! my friend and my dear countryman,
Roderigo !”

Gratiano, hearing the name, asks :

“What, of Venice ?”

and Iago replies :

“Even he, sir ; did you know him ?”

Gratiano emphatically answers :

“Know him ! ay,”

but apparently knew nothing of his coming disguised to Cyprus. Cassio is now placed on a chair, and Iago, directing those around, says :

“Some good man bear him carefully from hence ;
I'll fetch the general's surgeon.”

Then, referring to Roderigo, he exclaims to Cassio :

“He that lies here, Cassio,
Was my dear friend ; what malice was between you ?”

Cassio honestly answers :

“None in the world ; nor do I know the man.”

Iago sternly says to the poor sorrowing Bianca :

“ What ! look you pale ? ”

The wounded Cassio and Roderigo are then borne off, and Iago, asking Lodovico and Gratiano to remain, tries to lay the blame on the unfortunate Bianca, among whose sins hardness of heart seems to have no place, as she sincerely grieves over the wounded Cassio, amid general scorn and suspicion. Iago continues to her :

“ Look you pale, mistress ?
Do you perceive, gentlemen, the gastness of her eye ?

Behold her well ; I pray you, look upon her ;
Do you see, gentlemen ? nay, guiltiness will speak
Though tongues were out of use.”

Emilia now enters, and hears from Iago that Cassio has been attacked by Roderigo and others in the dark and wounded, and that Roderigo is slain. Iago tells his wife to ask Cassio where he supped that night, and turning on Bianca, asks :

“ What ! do you shake at that ? ”

and the unlucky Bianca has to own :

“ He supped at my house, but I therefore shake not.”

Iago replies :

“ O, did he so ? I charge you, go with me,”

while Emilia, still trusting her husband, also reproaches

the distressed and helpless Bianca. Iago, now taking on himself the direction of everything, addresses Lodovico and Gratiano, who hitherto appear to watch or hear him in observant silence :

“ Kind gentlemen, let’s go see poor Cassio dress’d.
Come, mistress, you must tell another tale.
Emilia, run you to the citadel,
And tell my lord and lady what hath happ’d.
Will you go on afore? ”

Having thus disposed of all around him, this arch-plotter says to himself, yet apparently in growing alarm or excitement :

“ This is the night
That either makes me, or fordoes me quite.”

The next and final scene is long, eventful, and the most pathetic in this tragedy. Othello, convinced of his wife’s guilt, enters her room while she is asleep. He exclaims, as if trying to harden himself for the crime he contemplates by dwelling on her alleged infidelity :

“ It is the cause, it is the cause, my soul,—
Let me not name it to you, you chaste stars!

Yet she must die, or she’ll betray more men.”

While determined in his fatal purpose, he continues to admire Desdemona’s beauty in sentimental words, and kissing her, exclaims :

“ O balmy breath, that dost almost persuade
Justice to break her sword! . . .

. . . I must weep,
But they are cruel tears : this sorrow's heavenly ;
It strikes where it doth love."

Desdemona awakes and suspects his object when, after advising her to pray, he says :

" I would not kill thy unprepared spirit ;
No—heaven forfend—I would not kill thy soul."

At hearing the terrific word she asks :

" Talk you of killing ? "

and he replies :

" Ay, I do " ;

she apparently has had some proofs of his fiery temper, as she proceeds :

" Then heaven
Have mercy on me ! "

and he replies :

" Amen, with all my heart ! "

She rejoins :

" If you say so, I hope you will not kill me,"

and proceeds, as he hardly answers :

" And yet I fear you, for you are fatal then,
When your eyes roll so."

He exclaims :

" Think on thy sins ! "

and she replies :

“They are loves I bear to you,”

and after more entreaty he reverts to the lost handkerchief, one of the chief causes of his fatal suspicion, exclaiming :

“That handkerchief which I so lov’d and gave thee,
Thou gav’st to Cassio”;

and she replies :

“No, by my life and soul !
Send for the man and ask him.”

He then, after more reproaches, tells her the terrific news that Cassio is killed, as he believes, and has confessed his and her guilt. At hearing this news she exclaims, distracted alike between fear and terror :

“Alas ! he is betray’d and I undone.”

These unfortunate words, uttered in her distracted amazement, confirm Othello’s worst suspicions, and he, after more words of jealous fury, smothers her as he had designed. The crime is only just committed when Emilia calls from without that she must speak with him. Othello, excited, horrified at what he has done, but not yet repenting, exclaims, partly in answer to her and partly to himself :

“Yes—’tis Emilia : by and by.—She’s dead.
’Tis like she comes to speak of Cassio’s death,

... Shall she come in ? ...

... What’s best to do ?

If she come in she’ll sure speak to my wife :
My wife ! my wife ! what wife ? I have no wife !”

The dreadful reality of the moment now first occurs to him :

“ O insupportable ! O heavy hour !
 Methinks it should be now a huge eclipse
 Of sun and moon, and that the affrighted globe
 Should yawn at alteration.”

Emilia again calls for admittance and Othello exclaims :

“ I had forgot thee : O, come in, Emilia.
 . . . Let me the curtain draw.”

Emilia enters and exclaims :

“ Cassio, my lord, hath kill’d a young Venetian
 Call’d Roderigo.”

Othello exclaims, naming his rival for the first time :

“ Roderigo kill’d ! ”

and asks :

“ And Cassio kill’d ? ”

and is evidently disappointed when she replies :

“ No, Cassio is not kill’d,”

as he exclaims :

“ Then murder’s out of tune,
 And sweet revenge grows harsh.”

The dying Desdemona is just able to exclaim that she is falsely murdered ; then, laying blame on herself, and declaring she has committed suicide, forgives Othello

and dies. Emilia, astounded and horrified, calls aloud for help, adding :

“O, who hath done this deed?”

Othello asks, perhaps wishing to hear what Emilia suspects :

“Why, how should she be murdered?”

and Emilia answers, perhaps with rising suspicion of the truth :

“Alas! who knows?”

when Othello, in a spirit unlike his former self, as if wishing to avoid suspicion, exclaims :

“You heard her say yourself, it was not I.”

Emilia, evidently suspecting the truth, replies bravely, remembering Desdemona first owning that she was falsely murdered, before her denial :

“She said so: I must needs report the truth!”

Then Othello, unused to any deception, and seeing what is in Emilia’s mind, wildly confesses that he has slain her; and Emilia nobly exclaims, while losing all fear of him at once :

“O, the more angel she,
And you the blacker devil.”

He answers briefly defending himself, and adding :

“She was false as water”;

and Emilia retorts :

“Thou art rash as fire to say
That she was false : O, she was heavenly true !”

Othello answers, in words first inculpating Cassio, which equally astonish and enrage Emilia :

“Ask thy husband else.
. . . Thy husband knew it all.”

Emilia can only exclaim :

“My husband ! . . .
That she was false to wedlock ?”

and Othello replies :

“Ay, with Cassio.”

Emilia, never knowing, and apparently never suspecting Iago before, repeats three times :

“My husband ?”

when Othello asks :

“What needs this iterance, woman ? I say, thy husband.”

Again Emilia exclaims, as if unable to believe her senses :

“O mistress, villainy hath made mock with love !—
My husband say that she was false !”

Othello replies with nervous agitation :

“He, woman,
I say, thy husband, dost understand the word ?
My friend, thy husband, honest, honest Iago !”

Then Emilia, still doubtful about Iago's guilt, yet utterly fearless in the cause of truth, and practically defying both Othello and Iago at the same moment, exclaims :

“ If he did say so, may his pernicious soul
Rot half a grain a day ! he lies to the heart ;
She was too fond of her most filthy bargain.”

Othello at this defiance likely shows signs of anger, as she nobly proceeds :

“ Do thy worst.

Thou hast not half the power to do me harm,
As I have to be hurt. O gull ! O dolt !

I care not for thy sword ; I'll make thee known
Though I lost twenty lives :—Help, help, ho ! help !
The Moor hath kill'd my mistress ! Murder, murder !”

Hearing her cries, Iago, Gratiano, and Montano enter ; while Emilia, still believing her husband is falsely accused, first addresses him :

“ O, are you come, Iago ? You have done well,
That men must lay their murders on your neck.”

Gratiano and Montano ask what is the matter, and Emilia, always showing a true, fearless love for her mistress, addresses Iago, while utterly defying Othello :

“ Disprove this villain, if thou be'st a man,
He says thou told'st him that his wife was false :
I know thou didst not, thou'rt not such a villain ;
Speak, for my heart is full.”

Iago, evidently embarrassed by his wife's spirit, then replies, yet not with his usual boldness :

“ I told him what I thought, and told no more
Than what he found himself was apt and true.”

He then owns that he did accuse Desdemona, and Emilia, turning her full indignation upon him, exclaims :

“ You told a lie,
Upon my soul a lie ; a wicked lie !—
She false with Cassio !—Did you say with Cassio ? ”

Iago, now trying to frighten her, replies :

“ With Cassio, mistress. Go to, charm your tongue.”

Emilia, perhaps for the first time in her married life, utterly defies her wicked husband, exclaiming :

“ I will not charm my tongue ; I am bound to speak,
My mistress here lies murder'd in her bed.”

All present except the two guilty men exclaim :

“ O heaven forefend ” ;

and Emilia proceeds :

“ And your reports have set the matter on.”

Othello, seeing the horrified looks of the Venetian gentlemen, so different from their former respect for him, exclaims, confirming Emilia :

“ Nay, stare not, masters ; it is true, indeed.”

Gratiano and Montano express briefly their horrified astonishment, while Emilia, now inspired with a courage of which perhaps none, certainly not Iago, ever thought her capable, proceeds like an avenging angel, animated by truth alone, and fearing no human power or brutality :

“Villainy, villainy, villainy!—
I think upon ‘t¹—I think I smell ‘t—O villainy!
I thought so then;—I’ll kill myself for grief.—
O villainy, villainy!”

Iago, evidently astonished at her sudden fearless spirit, which he never expected, exclaims in threatening wrath :

“What, are you mad? I charge you, get you home.”

But she now, to his amazement, disobeys him, and, animated with a love as strong as death for her slain mistress, appeals to the Venetian nobles :

“Good gentlemen, let me have leave to speak:
‘Tis proper I obey him, but not now.”

Then, foreseeing or guessing her own fate, yet fearless of it in a right cause, she addresses her husband :

“Perchance, Iago, I will ne’er go home.”

Othello, in terrible agitation, beginning to repent, yet

¹ “That is, at the instant when she gave Desdemona’s handkerchief to Iago.” Quoted in Staunton’s notes.

almost distracted by mingled anger and sorrow, falls upon the bed exclaiming—

“O! O! O!”

when Emilia, seeing his condition, says :

“ Nay, lay thee down and roar :
For thou hast kill'd the sweetest innocent
That e'er did lift up eye.”

Othello, rising, exclaims, still trying to believe in Desdemona's guilt :

“ O, she was foul !”

Then addressing Gratiano :

“ I scarce did know you, uncle. There lies your niece.

• • •
I know, this act looks horrible and grim.”

Gratiano, remembering how his brother Brabantio had opposed Desdemona's marriage, here exclaims :

“ Poor Desdemona ! I am glad thy father's dead ;
Thy match was mortal to him, and pure grief
Shore his old thread in twain ; did he live now,
This sight would make him do a desperate turn,
Yea, curse his better angel from his side,
And fall to reprobation.”

Othello, overcome by his crime, yet trying to rely on Iago's supposed truth and honesty, answers almost feebly :

“ 'Tis pitiful,”

and then repeats that Iago had known for certain of her guilt with Cassio, and that the latter confessed it, adding :

“ And she did gratify his amorous works
With that recognizance and pledge of love
Which I first gave her ; I saw it in his hand ;
It was a handkerchief, an antique token
My father gave my mother.”

The listening Emilia, shocked at now hearing her own unconscious mischief in stealing the handkerchief, exclaims from her grieved heart :

“ O God ! O heavenly God ! ”

while Iago, now dreading her evidence, exclaims, vainly trying to frighten her :

“ Come, hold your peace ! ”

But she in her turn, enraged as well as grieved by the part she had ignorantly taken in causing her mistress’s death, exclaims, yet determined to vindicate herself as well as Desdemona’s memory :

“ ’Twill out, ’twill out ;— I hold my peace, sir ? no ;
No, I will speak as liberal as the north ;
Let heaven, and men and devils, let them all,
All, all, cry shame against me, yet I’ll speak.”

Iago, with a last attempt to silence her, exclaims :

“ Be wise, and get you home.”

She refuses, and he tries to stab her, but is restrained by Gratiano, who exclaims :

“ Fie ! your sword upon a woman ? ”

and Emilia fearlessly proceeds, revealing the past to the wretched Othello :

“ O thou dull Moor ! that handkerchief thou speak’st of,
I found by fortune and did give my husband ;
For often with a solemn earnestness,
More than indeed belong’d to such a trifle,
He begged of me to steal it.”

Iago, now seeing he has no control over her, vehemently abuses her, declaring she lies, and she retorts, appealing to Gratiano and Montano :

“ By heaven, I do not ! I do not, gentlemen ! ”

Then, scornfully reproaching Othello, she asks :

“ O murderous coxcomb ! what should such a fool
Do with so good a wife ? ”

Iago now actually stabs Emilia, and, unable to say a word in his defence, rushes out, apparently with a vague idea of escaping. Othello, completely overcome by his own crime and the effect of Emilia’s statement, exclaims, as if helpless or in a dream :

“ Are there no stones in heaven,
But what serve for the thunder ?—Precious villain ! ”

Gratiano here declares, as Emilia falls, that Iago has slain her, while the brave, devoted woman exclaims, knowing she is mortally wounded :

“ Ay, ay ; O, lay me by my mistress’ side ! ”

Gratiano exclaims :

“ He’s gone, but his wife’s killed,”

and Montano, who evidently seems to have rather suddenly discovered the real character of “Honest Iago,” truly declares what has apparently never been known before :

“‘Tis a notorious villain”;

then says to Gratiano :

“Take you this weapon
Which I have recover’d from the Moor;
Come, guard the door without : let him not pass,
But kill him rather. I’ll after that same villain”;

Montano, while Gratiano watches outside, pursues the fugitive Iago, and the Moor is left with the dying Emilia. Othello exclaims, as if dazed and utterly prostrate in mind, alluding to the spirited young Montano :

“I am not valiant neither,
But every puny whipster gets my sword,—
But why should honour outlive honesty?
Let it go all.”

Emilia, recalling some last words of her beloved mistress, exclaims :

“What did thy song bode, lady?
Hark, canst thou hear me? I will play the swan,
And die in music,—*Willow, willow, willow.*”

Then, addressing the Moor for the last time .

“Moor, she was chaste ; she lov’d thee, cruel Moor,
So come my soul to bliss as I speak true,
So speaking as I think, I die,—I die.”

She expires, and Othello, finding he is without his sword, exclaims :

“ I have another weapon in this chamber,
It is a sword of Spain . . .
O, here it is.”

Then, addressing Gratiano, he exclaims :

“ Uncle, I must come forth,”

when Gratiano resolutely answers :

“ If thou attempt it, it will cost thee dear.”

Not knowing Othello is armed, he says :

“ Thou hast no weapon and perforce must suffer.”

Othello not wishing him yet to know he has a sword, exclaims :

“ Look in upon me then and speak with me,
Or, naked¹ as I am, I will assault thee.”

Gratiano at these words re-enters, and the Moor, now showing his sword, exclaims at first with some self-control, but which his distracted mind cannot long preserve :

“ Behold, I have a weapon ;
A better never did itself sustain
Upon a soldier’s thigh : I have seen the day,
That with this little arm, and this good sword,
I have made my way through more impediments
Than twenty times your stop.”

Then, comparing his glorious past with his present state, he breaks down and proceeds :

“But, O vain boast !
Who can control his fate ? ‘Tis not so now,—
Be not afraid though you do see me weapon’d ;
Here is my journey’s end, here is my butt,
And very seamark of my utmost sail.”

Then, apparently seeing that Gratiano, though indignant, has no desire to cope with so distinguished a warrior as himself, he proceeds :

“Do you go back dismay’d ? ‘tis a lost fear ;
Man but a rush¹ against Othello’s breast,
And he retires : where should Othello go ? ”

Where, indeed?—as in Christian lands he would be called a murderer, and in Mohammedan countries probably a dangerous renegade to that faith, and a foe to their religion. He then gazes at his victim, exclaiming :

“How dost thou look now ? O ill-starr’d wretch !
Pale as thy smock ! when we shall meet at compt,
This look of thine will hurl my soul from heaven,
And fiends will snatch at it !—Cold, cold, my girl ? ”

Then for a moment remembering Iago, he exclaims :

“O cursed, cursed slave ! ”

¹ “An allusion to the mock tournaments in which the combatants were armed with rushes in place of spears.”—Staunton’s notes.

In frantic self-reproach, and maddening grief at the sight before him, he wildly exclaims :

“Whip me, ye devils,
From the possession of this heavenly sight !
Blow me about in winds ! roast me in sulphur !
Wash me in steep-down gulfs of liquid fire !
O, Desdemona dead ! Desdemona dead !
O, O !”

Lodovico and Montano enter, rejoining Gratiano, bringing the wounded Cassio, and also Iago as a prisoner.

The three Venetians now direct everything, while Othello, gazing at Iago, exclaims :

“I look down towards his feet, but that’s a fable ;
If that thou be’st a devil, I cannot kill thee.”

Yet he wounds Iago, when Lodovico exclaims :

“Wrench his sword from him.”

But this direction is not so easy to execute, and apparently none attempts it, while Iago exclaims :

“I bleed, sir, but not kill’d,”

and Othello bitterly rejoins, as if partly stupefied :

“I am not sorry neither : I’d have thee live ;
For in my sense ‘tis happiness to die.”

Lodovico, displaying both sense and humanity, can-

not avoid even at this awful moment showing some pity for the Moor, exclaiming :

“O thou Othello, that wert once so good,
Fall’n in the practice ¹ of a damned slave,
What shall be said to thee?”

To this sad question the Moor answers with some firmness :

“Why anything :
An honourable murderer, if you will ;
For nought did I in hate, but all in honour.”

Lodovico then informs him :

“This wretch hath part confessed his villainy :
Did you and he consent in Cassio’s death ?”

Othello admits it, and Cassio, always faithful and attached to him, exclaims :

“Dear general, I never gave you cause,”

when the Moor sincerely replies :

“I do believe it, and I ask your pardon.”

Then, apparently addressing all around, Othello exclaims :

“Will you, I pray, demand that demi-devil,
Why he hath thus ensnared my soul and body ?”

Iago answers at once, with resolute gloomy determination :

“Demand me nothing : what you know, you know :
From this time forth I never will speak word.”

¹ “Machinations.”—Staunton’s notes.

Lodovico and Gratiano, who likely never knew such a hardened villain before, exclaim, the former :

“What, not to pray ?”

and the latter :

“Torments will ope your lips.”

Iago remaining resolutely silent, Othello, evidently broken down with grief and likely believing that no prayers would avail Iago, exclaims :

“Well, thou dost best.”

Lodovico then states that two letters were found in the pocket of the unfortunate Roderigo, one of them saying that Cassio was to be slain by him. Othello vainly exclaims, as Iago’s crimes are made more and more apparent :

“O villain !”

and Cassio, kind and harmless, though intemperate in his habits, exclaims in wondering words :

“Most heathenish and most gross !”

Lodovico then mentions the other letter, saying :

“This, it seems,
Roderigo meant to have sent this damned villain ;
But that belike Iago in the interim,
Came in and satisfied him.”

Othello only exclaims about Iago :

“O thou pernicious caitiff !”

then, addressing Cassio, asks :

“How came you, Cassio, by that handkerchief
That was my wife’s?”

and the other truthfully replies :

“I found it in my chamber,
And he himself confess’d but even now,
That there he dropped it for a special purpose,
Which wrought to his desire.”

Othello here exclaims, referring to himself and the deceit practised on him :

“O fool, fool, fool!”

and Cassio proceeds :

“There is besides in Roderigo’s letter,
How he upbraids Iago that he made him
Brave me upon the watch ; whereon it came
That I was cast, and even but now he spake,
After long seeming dead, Iago hurt him,
Iago set him on.”

Roderigo’s last words were thus evidently devoted to exposing Iago, and Lodovico now sternly addresses Othello, once a champion and now a criminal in Venetian estimation :

“You must forsake this room, and go with us :
Your power and your command is taken off,
And Cassio rules in Cyprus.”

He intimates torture and death for Iago, and again says to Othello :

“You shall close prisoner rest,
Till that the nature of your fault be known
To the Venetian State. Come, bring away.”

Othello, without again noticing Iago, makes his last speech to the Venetians, in which his private grief and public services are briefly noticed. He evidently intends these words to be his last, and though overcome by mental sorrow, he is still resolved to vindicate his high reputation as a faithful soldier to Venice, and this vindication he utters in words probably never forgotten by those who heard them. He exclaims, at first with forced calmness, which yields to passionate weeping :

“ Soft you ! a word or two before you go.
 I have done the state some service, and they know it ;
 No more of that ; I pray you in your letters,
 When you shall these unlucky deeds relate,
 Speak of me as I am, nothing extenuate,
 Nor set down aught in malice ; then must you speak
 Of one that lov’d not wisely but too well ;
 Of one not easily jealous, but being wrought,
 Perplex’d in the extreme ; of one whose hand,
 Like the base Indian, threw a pearl away,
 Richer than all his tribe.”

Then evidently bursting into floods of tears at remembering Desdemona, he proceeds, describing himself :

“ Of one whose subdu’d eyes,
 Albeit unused to the melting mood,
 Drop tears as fast as the Arabian trees
 Their med’cinable gum. Set you down this.”

Again he resumes his calmness while sending his last message to the Venetian Senate, as a final proof of his respect and devotion to their country’s honour :

“ And say besides that in Aleppo once,
 Where a malignant and a turban’d Turk,

Beat a Venetian and traduc'd the state,
I took by the throat the circumcised dog,
And smote him—thus.”

Imitating the probably fatal stab he inflicted on the insolent Mohammedan, Othello with these words stabs himself, to the amazement of Lodovico and Gratiano, and falling on Desdemona, exclaims, as he dies :

“I kiss'd thee ere I killed thee—no way but this,
Killing myself to die upon a kiss.”

Cassio, who, except Iago, knows Othello's nature better than any one, exclaims in real sympathy for the dead Moor :

“This did I fear, but thought he had no weapon ;
For he was great of heart.”

Lodovico, finally addressing the guilty, mute Iago exclaims in natural indignation :

“O Spartan dog,
More fell than anguish, hunger, or the sea !
Look on the tragic loading of this bed ;
This is thy work.”

Then addressing his Venetian friend :

“Gratiano, keep the house,
And seize upon the fortunes of the Moor,
For they succeed on you.”

Then to Cassio he says :

“To you, lord governor,
Remains the censure of this hellish villain ;
. . . O enforce it !
Myself will straight aboard and to the state,
This heavy act with heavy heart relate.”

These words end this fearful and affecting tragedy. Its fame both in Britain and on the Continent has always been extraordinary, though Macaulay's praise as to its being "perhaps the greatest work in the world" may be exaggerated. Yet actors and singers have vied with each other in presenting it before the most intelligent audiences. The charms of eloquence, declamation, music and painting have been alike liberally devoted to its illustration, in all those attractive forms of art. In the Italian opera it has been represented with all the power and beauty of musical expression. Rossini and Verdi have each written an opera on it, and the famous "jealousy duets" between Othello and Iago, "Non m'inganno" by the former and "Desdemona rea" by the latter composer, will likely be always remembered with pleasure by their hearers. In Rossini's musical version of the terrible scene between Othello and his deceiver, the surprise and anxiety of the former and the subtle insinuations of the latter finally lead to a burst of fury, in which the feelings of the enraged dupe and the triumph of the vindictive Iago are vocally expressed with the full genius of the great composer. In Verdi's duet describing the same passage, the instrumental accompaniment expresses perhaps more than the voices the vehemence and passion of the scene, ending with the almost realistic sound of a fatal stab dealt by a murderous hand. Evidently Rossini and Verdi alike succeeded through their different styles in expressing the true meaning of the terrible scene by the attractive medium of their delightful art. In review-

ing this great work, however, the fact of only one villain being in it, with no confidant or confederate, who is loved or trusted by all he knows, and yet wilfully destroys or ruins most of the chief persons in it, renders this play unlike the rest of Shakespeare's tragedies. In “Richard III.,” that King is obeyed by thousands of devoted followers after his crimes are known, yet who die for him on the battlefield. In “Henry VIII.,” that extraordinary, unscrupulous King was popular to the last among many admiring, obedient subjects. In “King Lear,” the chief villain, Edmund, is beloved by the Duke of Cornwall and by the rival Princesses, Goneril and Regan, who fully participate in his crimes. King John, despite his dangerous and odious character, evidently had some friendly adherents to the last. But Iago, in private life, stands alone, trusted by nearly all who know him, yet trusting none himself. Whether his conduct throughout is consistent with the calm shrewdness Othello describes, of one “who knows all qualities with a learned spirit of human dealings,” may surely be doubted. Though his plots succeed, they involve also his own ruin, and, besides, his discovering that he had never the least reason to take revenge on any one. All around him are really friends to him. He has no enemy to hate or dread throughout; his two alleged wrongs are Cassio being promoted before him, and his own wife's suspected intimacy with Othello. The first grievance is of slight importance. Iago is much more confidential with Othello than Cassio, who, on his part, always

admires and likes Iago. Indeed, Cassio's weak, mild character and drunken habits would scarcely have allowed his being long even in nominal authority over such a man as Iago. A "mere suspicion" of his wife Emilia's infidelity seems inconsistent with Iago's common sense to act upon. The very fact of her devotion to Desdemona, and the latter's love for her, might almost have convinced a man of the world like Iago that his jealousy was groundless. Had Emilia ever been Othello's mistress, of which Iago owns he had no proof, she could scarcely have loved her rival in the Moor's love, nor been beloved and trusted by Desdemona in return. Their firm and mutual attachment was surely almost as decisive a proof as could be of Emilia's innocence. Yet Iago risks all his future fortunes for the sake of avenging a supposed wrong about which he owns he is not certain. He must indeed have been convinced of his error when seeing Desdemona and Emilia both dead before him through his means, directly and indirectly.

His last emphatic declaration that he will never again "speak word" evinces neither triumph nor repentance, despite the complete and fatal success of his malignant powers. Iago's last words seem rather to denote a strong mind stunned, or secretly confounded, by all that has happened, and especially by his wife's brave devotion to her mistress, which apparently takes him altogether by surprise. He had, moreover, left no loophole for his own escape; he has no firm ally or confederate when finally detected.

He merely “runs out,” but is, of course, immediately arrested, sentenced to death by torture, and left in the power of men who all know his guilt and abhor him accordingly. His wickedness, however, is so great, so successful, and so remorseless, that his own suicidal folly is seldom noticed. His consistent language seems practically that of a shrewd, self-reliant man with great knowledge of human nature ; yet, when his actual conduct is calmly examined, it is more like that of a reckless, as well as vindictive, desperado. When he owns to Roderigo that in his experience of life he never knew the man who could love himself, it might be expected that he would never injure or destroy friends and benefactors without at least some plausible plan for his own advantage. His assumed knowledge of human nature also may seem exaggerated when the characters of those he deals with are carefully remembered. In all Venice he could hardly have found three men more easily guided, influenced, or persuaded than Othello, Cassio and Roderigo, who all admire and trust him from the first, while in his wife Emilia he is evidently completely mistaken. He believes neither in her faithfulness to him nor in her personal heroism ; hence his crimes are chiefly caused by his distrust of the former, while his final detection is mainly caused by his ignorance of the latter. Iago can hardly be thought a triumphant villain, despite the immediate success of his deceit ; his malignant course is undertaken and followed under a delusion of his own suspicious nature, and its result is practically more terrible to himself than to any of his trustful,

innocent victims. When Desdemona and Emilia are compared, the latter is perhaps as worthy of general admiration as the former. Desdemona secretly deserted her loving father and married Othello, the man of her choice, without ever hinting her intention to Brabantio. His grief at the elopement of his only child hastens, perhaps even causes, his death. Yet she is never represented as caring about him or making any inquiry after him. Her devotion to Othello and her friendship for the giddy, kind-hearted Cassio are certainly pleasing traits, but she never shows, and, indeed, never has occasion to show, the self-sacrificing courage of Emilia. The weak, intemperate Cassio and the passionate, excitable Roderigo are alike deceived by Iago ; while his wife, though loving him, as proved by her wishing "to please his fantasy," evidently does her duty both to him and to her mistress with consistent fidelity to the last ; yet Emilia is sometimes regarded as a minor character in this tragedy, of which she is really and practically the true heroine.

II

"MACBETH" (A.D. 1039)

THIS play seems a good deal founded on fact yet more in the events than in its characters. Shakespeare closely follows the account of Holinshed, while Sir Walter Scott gives a rather different version of the events on which the tragedy is founded. King Duncan, his son and successor, Malcolm III., Macbeth himself, his wife, and Macduff, were real persons, but it may be doubted if Banquo and Fleance ever existed. The scene is almost entirely in Scotland, but none of the personages, except in name, have any Scottish characteristics. It has indeed been remarked¹ that Banquo rather resembles a "canny Scot," but neither he nor any of the subordinate persons speak with a Scottish accent, though Shakespeare was acquainted with it.² The ancient Gaelic language is not mentioned; the plaid dress of the country and its old weapons, dirks and claymores, are never introduced, and but for the

¹ Mr. Furnivall's Introduction to the "Royal Shakespeare."

² See "King Henry V."

historical incidents and a few Scottish names the characters and events of this play might be imagined in England. The first act introduces the three witches who take such an important part in the tragedy. Evidently knowing the state of Scotland, they allude to a real battle being fought against the King, whose forces are commanded by Macbeth. In reality Macbeth saw them in a dream, or may have met three artful women,¹ who, knowing the prevailing Scottish belief in witchcraft, made money by telling fortunes, and were everywhere believed and dreaded.² They vanish after a few words announcing their coming interview with Macbeth, and the next scene introduces King Duncan, with his sons and officers, who hear from a wounded captain, and also from Lord Rosse, about the bravery of his two generals, Macbeth and Banquo, in quelling the revolt of the Macdonalds, allied with Norwegian invaders, aided by the Lord of Cawdor, who in another part of Scotland rebelled against Duncan, but was captured and executed.

The King now declares that his loyal general, Macbeth, shall obtain all the titles and property belonging to the treacherous Lord of Cawdor, and the next scene re-introduces the witches on a heath

¹ See Scott's "History of Scotland," vol. i.

² "It has been observed that while, according to the old English creed, the witch was a miserable decrepit hag, the slave rather than the mistress of the demons which haunted her, she in Scotland rose to the dignity of a potent sorceress, who mastered the evil spirit and, forcing it to do her will, spread among the people a far deeper and more lasting terror."—Buckle's "History of Civilisation," vol. iii.

during a thunderstorm.¹ These beings, in the dream or excited fancy of the real Macbeth, were of lofty stature and great beauty,² but the vague legends which Shakespeare follows describe them as "withered and weird" in appearance, with beards, said to be the sure sign of a witch³—otherwise they resembled women, probably, in voice and dress. These three, in their first conversation together, reveal malignant hatred to the human race, as well as their great, yet strangely limited power, and also their complete union in design and thought. One of the witches relates having been refused some chestnuts by a sailor's wife, and vindictively discloses her plan of revenge on the husband, regretfully admitting her limited powers of mischief, which enable her to torment the luckless sailor for a certain time, but not to destroy his vessel :

"Her husband's to Aleppo gone, master o' the *Tiger* :⁴
But in a sieve I'll thither sail,

¹ Buckle thinks that the Scottish climate and scenery greatly strengthened belief in witchcraft, mentioning "the storms and the mists ; the darkened sky flashed by frequent lightning ; the peals of thunder reverberating from mountain to mountain, and echoing on every side," &c., as marked contrasts to the milder climate and less romantic scenery of England ("History of Civilisation," vol. iii.). Shakespeare, certainly, associates thunder and storms, mists and heath-covered mountains, with these witches, as if such were their natural surroundings.

² Scott's "History of Scotland," vol. i.

³ Staunton's notes to "Macbeth."

⁴ "Sir W. C. Trevelyan has noted that in Hakluyt's 'Voyages' there are several letters and journals of a voyage made to Aleppo in the ship

And like a rat without a tail,
 I'll do, I'll do, and I'll do.
 2ND WITCH. I'll give thee a wind.
 1ST WITCH. Thou art kind.
 3RD WITCH. And I another.
 1ST WITCH. I myself have all the other,
 And the very ports they blow,
 All the quarters that they know,
 I' the shipman's card,
 I will drain him dry as hay :
 Sleep shall neither night nor day
 Hang upon his penthouse lid ;
 He shall live a man forbid :
 Weary sev'n nights, nine times nine ;
 Shall he dwindle, peak, and pine :
 Though his bark cannot be lost,
 Yet it shall be tempest-toss'd.
 Look what I have.

2ND WITCH. Show me, show me.
 1ST WITCH. Here I have a pilot's thumb,
 Wreck'd, as homeward he did come.

(Drum without.)

3RD WITCH. A drum, a drum !
 Macbeth doth come.

They all three then exclaim together of themselves :

“The weird^x sisters, hand in hand,
 Posters of the sea and land,
 Thus do go about, about ;
 Thrice to thine and thrice to mine,
 And thrice again to make up nine :—
 Peace !—the charm's wound up.”

Macbeth and Banquo then appear on the heath, perceive and wonder at the three witches, who, disregarding the latter, never speak till their future dupe,

Tiger of London, in the year 1583” (Staunton's notes). It is probable therefore that this allusion would have interested or amused a London theatrical audience.

^x “Weird signifies fatal, or prophetic.”—Staunton's notes.

Macbeth, addresses them, when they severally greet him as Lord of Glamis, Lord of Cawdor, and future King of Scotland.¹ Macbeth starts, and shows fear at these words, while Banquo boldly asks about his own fortunes. They mysteriously answer that his descendants, not he, shall reign in Scotland, and seem moving away, for Macbeth entreats them to stay and tell more; but they vanish, leaving the astonished generals to discuss and ponder over their vague intimations.² Upon Macbeth they make immediate impression, but little, if any, upon Banquo, who is throughout a calm, practical, brave officer, without

¹ “It is probable that Shakespeare—it is certain that the immense majority even of his most highly-educated and gifted contemporaries—believed with an unfaltering faith in the reality of witchcraft. Shakespeare was, therefore, perfectly justified in introducing into his plays personages who were of all others most fitted to enhance the grandeur and the solemnity of tragedy, when they faithfully reflected the belief of the audience.”—Lecky’s “Rationalism,” vol. i.

² “For many centuries after Macbeth’s period, the power and influence of pretended witches prevailed in Scotland, even among people of comparative education. Witchcraft and demonology, even during the reign of George II. were believed in by almost all ranks.”—Scott’s “Heart of Midlothian,” chap. ix. In the “Bride of Lammermoor,” Scott introduces a malevolent hag, called Ailsie Gourlay, stating that she was a historical character, and was charged with having, “by the aids and delusions of Satan, shown to a young person of quality, in a mirror-glass, a gentleman, then abroad, to whom the said person was betrothed, and who appeared in the mirror to be bestowing his hand upon another lady” (chap. xxxi.). This unfortunate impostor was tried and executed by the Scottish Privy Council for alleged witchcraft. Scott adds: “Notwithstanding the dreadful punishments inflicted upon the supposed crime of witchcraft, there wanted not those who, steeled by want and bitterness of spirit, were willing to adopt the hateful and dangerous character for the sake of the influence which its terrors enabled them to exercise in the vicinity, and the wretched emolument which they could extract, by the practice of their supposed art.”

either the ambition or imagination of Macbeth. The latter is soon after saluted by Duncan's messengers, proclaiming him Lord of Cawdor, thus confirming in his anxious mind a part of the witches' prophecy. The two generals then meet their old sovereign, who, welcoming them as loyal, valiant subjects, greets them with thanks and compliments, while announcing his approaching visit to Macbeth's castle.

Before they arrive, Lady Macbeth hears both of the coming royal visit, and also of the appearance and words of the three witches. Although a bold, ambitious, worldly woman, she from the first believes them, implicit faith in witchcraft and magic being evidently general, if not universal, in Scotland at this period.¹ She has all her husband's ambition, without a particle of his loyalty to the King, which prevents his following her counsels as speedily and eagerly as she wishes. Directly she hears of the King's visit, she resolves in her own mind that he shall never leave Macbeth's castle alive. For she thoroughly believes the witches' prediction about her husband's becoming king, and, though they never suggested crime as necessary to confirm their prophecy, she resolves to persuade Macbeth to remove every obstacle to its fulfilment.

She reads in her husband's castle a letter from him announcing his strange meeting with the witches,

¹ "The high pretensions of Scotch witchcraft never degenerated, as in other countries, into a mere attempt at deception, but always remained a sturdy and deep-rooted belief."—Buckle's "Civilisation," vol. iii.

their telling him he will become King of Scotland and be previously made Lord of Cawdor. The title of Glamis he possessed before, but he and she now foresee or expect the two future distinctions, and she therefore exclaims eagerly to herself, as if addressing him :

“Glamis thou art, and Cawdor.”

This last title she might likely expect for Macbeth owing to the rebellion of its unfortunate owner, who was of course proclaimed a traitor. But the sovereignty of Scotland, though Macbeth is related to the King, is a delightful astonishment to her, as King Duncan has two sons, Malcolm and Donalbain, both loyal to their reigning father. She therefore proceeds with some doubt, yet determined :—

“ And shalt be,
What thou art promis’d: yet do I fear thy nature;
It is too full of the milk of human kindness,
To catch the nearest way. . . .

Hie thee hither,
That I may pour my spirits in thine ear
And chastise with the valour of my tongue
All that impedes thee from the golden round,
Which fate and metaphysical¹ aid doth seem
To have thee crowned withal.”

It is, perhaps, strange that the idea never occurs to her superstitious mind that probably Duncan and his sons were alike fated to die before Macbeth, which would ensure his lawful as well as predicted

¹ “Supernatural.”—Staunton’s notes.

accession to the Scottish throne. This hope apparently occurred to Macbeth himself, on first hearing the prophecy, when he exclaimed :

“If chance will have me king, why, chance may crown me,
Without my stir.”

But Lady Macbeth, more relentless as well as more ambitious than her husband, immediately conceives the horrible idea of murdering her royal guest, which she urges upon Macbeth, against his will, with the most ruthless determination. Such a crime, involving deliberate regicide, with the most fearful violation of the duties of hospitality, the real Lady Macbeth never contemplated, though a resolute woman, and personally hostile to King Duncan.¹

On Macbeth's arrival home, soon after his wife hears of the royal visit, she congratulates him on his new dignity and promised royalty, immediately suggesting to his agitated, unwilling mind the murder of their guest and sovereign.² She is a thoroughly hardened, ambitious woman, resolute and utterly unscrupulous. Her love for Macbeth, upon which so much stress has been laid, seems, when considered in reference to her worldly position and interests, worthy

¹ Scott's “History of Scotland.”

² Mrs. Jameson truly says that Lady Macbeth bears less resemblance to her historical prototype than Cleopatra and Octavia to theirs, and is, therefore, more of Shakespeare's own creation. “She revels, she luxuriates in her dream of power” (“Characteristics of Women”). Mrs. Jameson thinks that her ambition is more for her husband's sake than her own; yet her words and conduct scarcely warrant this assumption.

of little, if any, commendation. She knows her fortunes are now linked with his, and that with his increasing power her own will rise proportionately, owing to her influence over him. Shakespeare's noble language alone gives an apparent dignity to a base, shameless character, whose ambition is selfish and worldly. The language with which this hateful woman persuades her brave yet weak husband to slay the King is in Shakespeare's grandest style. She exclaims joyfully, at meeting and congratulating him on his new distinctions in due course—

“ Great Glamis, worthy Cawdor !
Greater than both, by the all-hail hereafter !
Thy letters have transported me beyond
This ignorant present, and I feel now
The future in the instant.”

He replies :

“ My dearest love,
Duncan comes here to-night.”

She asks an important, dangerous question, the secret meaning of which he very likely apprehends at once, or guesses :

“ And when goes hence ? ”

He replies, as if hesitating :

“ To-morrow as he purposes.”

She promptly if not vehemently rejoins :

"O never

Shall sun that morrow see !
 Your face, my Thane, is as a book, where men
 May read strange matters."

She proceeds to give him certainly able instructions in her odious designs against the trustful King :

"To beguile the time,
 Look like the time ; bear welcome in your eye,
 Your hand, your tongue : look like the innocent flower,
 But be the serpent under it. He that's coming
 Must be provided for : and you shall put
 This night's great business into my dispatch,
 Which shall to all our nights and days to come
 Give solely sovereign sway and masterdom."

To this prospect of the somewhat doubtful joys and delights of royalty, Macbeth at first makes a rather cold or disappointing reply :

"We will speak further."

And she boldly if not enthusiastically rejoins, noticing his depressed look :

"Only look up clear ;
 To alter favour ¹ ever is to fear :
 Leave all the rest to me."

The same ideas, methods, and designs expressed in common parlance would surely excite only horror and disgust, with a laudable desire to punish both the temptress and tempted. For there is really nothing redeeming in their thoughts ; nothing palliating in their circumstances ; nothing, in short, to arouse the

¹ Feature.

least sympathy for their conduct in any way. Were they suffering from any sense of real or supposed injustice, or had they any object whatever beyond their ambition and the worldly pleasures expected from its gratification, there would be some reason, even if morally insufficient, for the deep interest, resembling compassion, if not sympathy, with which the Macbeths have been often regarded. But if their expressed thoughts are carefully examined, apart from Shakespeare's splendid language, they are merely a cruel, ungrateful, selfish couple, “choked with ambition of the meaner sort,”¹ who commit crime after crime without the least provocation, and only for the mean object of obtaining power and wealth, with their attendant pleasures. Yet Lady Macbeth has been represented both on the stage and in essays with a dignity and grandeur almost worthy of Catherine of Aragon, Joan of Arc, or Margaret of Anjou. In truth, she ought to be ranked with Goneril and Regan, the wicked daughters of King Lear; as, except in her love for Macbeth, with whom her worldly interests are completely involved, she never evinces an unselfish feeling, never utters a single noble sentiment, and seems never inspired by a single generous motive.

Perhaps the most morally affecting scene in the whole play is where Macbeth, while still innocent and not ungrateful to his kind sovereign, almost begs his wife to let him abandon the assassination scheme. But she is thoroughly determined, using her influence

¹ “ Henry VI.”

over him with far more fiendish purpose and success than the witches had attempted to do. For, even after his interview with them, he retains some touch of right feeling, of which she never shows the least sign; and he gradually yields completely to her wishes and persuasion.

“MACBETH. We will proceed no further in this business :
He hath honour'd me of late ; and I have bought
Golden opinions from all sorts of people,
Which would be worn now in their newest gloss,
Not cast aside so soon.

LADY MACBETH. Was the hope drunk,
Wherein you dress'd yourself? hath it slept since ?
And wakes it now, to look so green and pale
At what it did so freely? From this time,
Such I account thy love. Art thou afeard
To be the same in thine own act and valour,
As thou art in desire? Wouldst thou have that
Which thou esteem'st the ornament of life,
And live a coward in thine own esteem ?”

These and many other such high-sounding words, when spoken by Mrs. Siddons and other great actresses, have apparently invested Lady Macbeth with a grandeur and interest of which her character and conduct are quite undeserving. They might well become a heroine inspiring some craven ally with courage to attempt a daring exploit. In this case, a cruel, hardened woman is urging a brave, ambitious, but not yet thoroughly unscrupulous husband to murder an old, helpless man—their benefactor—while asleep in their house, for the purpose of obtaining his kingdom and possessions.

Lady Macbeth's courage is often mentioned; but, considering the many artful precautions she and her

husband take while committing murder in their own castle, surrounded by adherents, and without giving their helpless victims the least chance either of defence or flight, it is not easy to see where they display any courage, except in braving possible consequences. Had not Macbeth's troubled conscience beset him, which his wife always dreaded, but could not entirely foresee, his usurpation of the Scottish throne might have been a permanent success. The young Princes had fled the country. Macbeth was both powerful and popular with the army, and all Scotland acknowledged his rule. When tormented not only by his conscience, but by the ghosts of his victims, he was, of course, confounded, amazed, and unable to refute the suspicions which his own nervous fears aroused. Had he been as hardened as his wife, and not troubled by ghosts, his enterprise promised as good a chance of success as any bold usurper would have wished, or at least expected. But neither in the successive murders of King Duncan, his two servants, Banquo, Lady Macduff and her children, is the least sign of courage shown by either Macbeth or his wife. In each case, their safety is nearly as well secured as they could have desired. The old King is slain asleep, while his two attendants, having been drugged into heavy slumber, are also killed, when all three are helpless and unconscious. The gallant Banquo is murdered by two hired armed ruffians, who, had they failed, would never have been believed, if Macbeth disavowed employing them. Lastly, Lady Macduff, a helpless woman, in her husband's absence, with her

children, are also slain by hired assassins. Throughout these cowardly atrocities, Macbeth and his wife are exposed to no risk, and yet they exhort, praise, and animate each other, in grand language worthy of a true hero and heroine, which is entirely owing to Shakespeare's genius and fancy, their acts and designs being alike incompatible with true courage or heroic sentiment of any kind. When planning the King's murder, and after its commission, this wicked pair never say a word about the state of Scotland, or express any idea of advancing its prosperity.¹

Many assassinations and other crimes have been committed with a vague idea of doing evil that good might ensue. In Macbeth's position, had he or his wife possessed redeeming qualities, they might have believed, or tried to believe, that King Duncan, though their benefactor, yet oppressed or misgoverned their country, and that they would rule the kingdom better. No such idea is ever mentioned: they have no object whatever but to seize the government of Scotland, with its accompanying advantages and anticipated pleasures. For this purpose, Macbeth, though at first reluctant, is induced by his wife to slay the King. He also kills two servants, when asleep; after which Lady Macbeth stains them with blood, she and her husband pretending that these attendants were induced by Prince Malcolm to kill his father, and that Macbeth slew them, when he discovered

¹ "The real Macbeth killed his sovereign Duncan in battle, and not in his own castle, and was a just and equitable ruler."—Scott's "History of Scotland," vol. i.

they had murdered the King. Shakespeare vividly describes Macbeth as conscience-stricken and horrified before and after the murder. This account is imaginary, as history represents him quite a different man ; while Holinshed's legends, which are chiefly followed in the play, scarcely mention his state of mind. Before the King's murder Macbeth's excited fancy makes him believe himself tempted to commit the crime by an invisible evil spirit, and he apprehensively exclaims :

“ Is this a dagger which I see before me,
The handle toward my hand ? Come, let me clutch thee :—
I have thee not, and yet I see thee still.
Art thou not, fatal vision, sensible
To feeling as to sight ? or art thou but
A dagger of the mind, a false creation,
Proceeding from the heat-oppressèd brain ?
. . . There's no such thing.”

Macbeth's reluctance and his wife's desire to commit this murder are described in Shakespeare's most powerful language. He feebly protests against the crime, but his wife, after scornfully ridiculing his reluctance, which she thinks a sort of cowardice, arranges the assassination in her own way, and thus reveals her plan :

“ When Duncan is asleep
(Whereto the rather shall his hard day's journey
Soundly invite him), his two chamberlains
Will I with wine and wassail so convince,
That memory, the warder of the brain,
Shall be a fume, and the receipt of reason
A limbeck only ; when in swinish sleep
Their drenched natures lie, as in a death,
What cannot you and I perform upon

The unguarded Duncan? what not put upon
 His spongy officers; who shall bear the guilt
 Of our great quell?"

Shakespeare's Macbeth seems hardly a natural character, and we know he was different from the real one. He is a brave, loyal officer, who a short time before this scene had risked his life in King Duncan's service, and been richly rewarded for his merits. Yet now, on hearing this not only cruel, but thoroughly base and treacherous plot proposed, he apparently thinks it a proof of his wife's courage, for he rejoins, in a sort of admiring ecstasy :

" Bring forth men-children only,
 For thy undaunted mettle should compose
 Nothing but males,"

and completely yields to her guidance, exclaiming firmly, yet in great agitation :

" I am settled, and bend up
 Each corporal agent to this terrible feat;
 Away and mock the time with fairest show:
 False face must hide what the false heart doth know."

But there is surely nothing "undaunted" in her designs; for she takes every precaution against the least possible risk both to herself and to Macbeth. She is evidently meant to be a person of great spirit and daring, but her plot against the King is worthy of the most cowardly assassin who was ever deservedly executed. Shakespeare makes Lady Macbeth confess that, had not Duncan resembled her own father when

asleep, she would have slain him herself. This very slight touch of human feeling has been much commented on, as if it were rather redeeming, yet, if examined, it is surely of very little consequence. She was about to commit a deliberate murder, but fancied the intended victim resembled one of her own family, so preferred to have him killed by another, while fully resolved on his death. Had he resembled any one else, she would have murdered him herself without scruple. Immediately after Duncan's murder, Macbeth's nervousness and his wife's utter callousness of spirit are contrasted in Shakespeare's most expressive language :

“ MACBETH. Methought I heard a voice cry, ‘ *Sleep no more ! Macbeth doth murder sleep,*’—the innocent sleep, Sleep that knits up the ravell'd sleeve of care, The death of each day's life, sore labour's bath, Balm of hurt minds, great nature's second course, Chief nourisher in life's feast,—

LADY MACBETH. What do you mean ?

MACBETH. Still it cried, ‘ *Sleep no more !* ’ ”

She then scornfully bids him return to the apartment of the slain King, and to stain the attendant grooms with blood. Macbeth, like a terrified child, replies :

“ I'll go no more ;
I am afraid to think what I have done ;
Look on't again I dare not.

LADY MACBETH. Infirm of purpose !
Give me the daggers ; the sleeping and the dead
Are but as pictures : 'tis the eye of childhood
That fears a painted devil. If he do bleed,
I'll gild the faces of the grooms withal ;
For it must seem their guilt. [Exit.] ”

While she is thus employed Macbeth exclaims, in bewildered horror at his crimes :

“ Will all great Neptune’s ocean wash this blood
Clean from my hand ? No ; this my hand will rather
The multitudinous seas incarnadine,
Making the green one red.”

After the King’s assassination, the Princes Malcolm and Donalbain escape to England and Ireland, Macduff returning to Fife, while Banquo, once intimate with Macbeth, remains in his castle, though no longer in his confidence. On the flight of the Princes, Macbeth is proclaimed King, or assumes the title, though it is not clearly shown in the play why the prior rights of Malcolm and Donalbain are not immediately advocated by some of the Scottish chieftains.

Macbeth and Banquo now distrust each other, the latter suspecting the truth ; and the newly-crowned King and Queen, guessing his thoughts, resolve to destroy him also. Macbeth, however, accomplishes Banquo’s murder without his wife’s assistance, by bribing two murderers to slay both him and his son Fleance. These ruffians kill Banquo, but Fleance escapes to England, and there rejoins Prince Malcolm. Macbeth, in full power and unopposed, takes more trouble to effect Banquo’s murder than many chiefs equally powerful and unscrupulous would have done. Instead of employing devoted adherents to himself—Highland bravos, bullies, or “ boys of the belt,” as Scott calls them—he summons, addresses, and bribes

two strangers, personally hostile to Banquo, who are very poor, unfortunate, and desperate, but not particularly attached to him, and whom he has apparently seen only once before.

“ 2ND MURDERER. I am one, my liege,
Whom the vile blows and buffets of the world
Have so incens'd, that I am reckless what
I do, to spite the world.

1ST MURDERER. And I another,
So weary with disasters, tugg'd with fortune,
That I would set my life on any chance,
To mend it, or be rid on 't.

KING MACBETH. Both of you
Know Banquo was your enemy.

2ND MURDERER. True, my lord.”

After Banquo's death, Macbeth gives an entertainment to his adherents and followers. At this feast Banquo's ghost appears, visible to him only. He is so terrified that his wife, though herself quite composed, has to send away the guests, wondering at Macbeth's frightened looks and words. Hitherto Lady Macbeth has never shown the least remorse for any of the murders of which she has been either the chief instigator or fully cognizant. But from the first she has been apprehensive about her husband's remorseful terrors, and now becomes utterly confounded at being unable to inspire him with her own consistent hardihood. He recovers spirit, however, when alone with her, and they both remark Macduff's absence from the feast, Macbeth avowing that he has spies employed about the house of every important person. He declares that he will see the witches next day, and apparently guesses where to find them ; but his wife

expresses no desire to accompany him, and they retire to rest.

The next scene is again on the witches' heath, where Hecate, their queen, reproves her three subordinates for trafficking with Macbeth

"In riddles and affairs of death"

during her absence. She then departs, ordering them to meet her next morning at the pit of Acheron, and to have all their spells and charms ready, for Macbeth will certainly visit them then and there, to know his destiny.¹ She then flies off in a cloud, and the witches, having heard her rebuke in silence, hasten to obey, in evident fear of her superior powers. Why Hecate should rebuke them, and why they are not quite agreed, is unexplained; but the three have apparently first met Macbeth of their own accord, without asking the terrible

"Mistress of their charms,
The close contriver of all harms,
. . . to bear her part,
Or show the glory of their art."

Yet the influence they obtained over Macbeth without Hecate's assistance was apparently complete.

The next scene introduces two Scottish lords, evidently perplexed and alarmed at all the recent

¹ Gibbon states that firm belief in magic and witchcraft "reigned in every climate of the globe, and adhered to every system of religious opinion," even since Christianity, and that the nations of the Roman world "dreaded the mysterious power of spells and incantations, of potent herbs and execrable rites, which could extinguish or recall life, inflame the passions of the soul, blast the works of Creation, and extort from the reluctant demons the secret of futurity" ("Decline and Fall," chap. xxix.).

horrors in their country, and hardly daring to utter suspicions of the successful usurper, which they intimate rather than avow. They state that Macduff, rejecting Macbeth's late invitation to the palace, where he would probably have met the fate of Banquo, has fled to England, where, with Prince Malcolm, at King Edward's Court, he intends seeking the active assistance of Lord Northumberland—"warlike Siward," a powerful nobleman—for the invasion, or rather liberation, of Scotland.¹

After this short but important allusion to real history, the fourth act opens with the grandest imaginative scene of the whole play. The three witches, now in accord with Hecate, are in a dark cave, around their boiling cauldron, while thunder is heard. They fill it with poisonous herbs, limbs of snakes, toads, and lizards; also with the liver, nose, and lips of Jews, Tartars, and Turks, while repeating thrice in unison the words.

“ Double, double, toil and trouble;
Fire burn, and cauldron bubble.”

Although so utterly malignant—even fiendish—in mind and conduct, these hags evince a nominal Christianity, by terming Jews blasphemers, and it seems uncertain if they call them so in mere mockery, or in accordance with the Christian ideas of the period, for of all unchristian nations the Jews were, even in

¹ Hume states that old Siward's daughter had been married to the murdered King Duncan. By order of his sovereign, Edward the Confessor, “he marched an army into Scotland, defeated and killed Macbeth in battle, and restored Malcolm to the throne of his ancestors” (“History of England,” chap. iii.).

Shakespeare's time, viewed with the most peculiar and prejudiced dislike. The witches, after boiling their cauldron, pronounce their charm "firm and good," when Hecate appears. She now praises their diligence, telling them to sing round the cauldron, and, promising some indefinite reward, vanishes; and Macbeth alone enters the cavern, again confronting the three temptresses for the second and last time in his doomed life.¹

Macbeth, in this last scene with the witches, likewise acknowledges their malignant power over winds, corn crops, trees and castles, but not over human life. They are now more communicative and triumphant than when they had first met him on the blasted heath of Forres, as their prediction about his being king is so unexpectedly and rapidly fulfilled. For he is now King of Scotland, and, though threatened with English invasion and domestic revolution, his present rule within Scotland is undisputed. His faith in the witches being thoroughly confirmed, he entreats them in desperate language to reveal more of his future fortunes.

"MACBETH. I conjure you, by that which you profess
(Howe'er you come to know it), answer me :
Though you untie the winds, and let them fight
Against the churches : though the yesty waves

¹ For many centuries after Macbeth's period, belief in witches and witchcraft existed even among the most learned and pious Europeans. In 1484, Pope Innocent VIII. declared that these beings "destroy the births of women and the increase of cattle; they blast the corn on the ground, the grapes in the vineyards, the fruits of the trees, and the grass and herbs of the field."—Draper's "Intellectual Development of Europe," chap. iv.

Confound and swallow navigation up :
Though bladed corn be lodg'd, and trees blown down :
Though castles topple on their warders' heads :
Though palaces, and pyramids, do slope
Their heads to their foundation : though the treasure
Of nature's germins tumble altogether,
Even till destruction sicken, answer me
To what I ask you.”

They ask him, perhaps in mockery, if he had rather be informed by them or by their masters. He chooses the latter, and immediately three apparitions—of an armed man's head, and then two children—the first stained with blood, the second wearing a crown, and with a tree in its hand—address him by name. The first warns him against Macduff, who, since Banquo's death, has often been in Macbeth's mind as his greatest foe. The others console him by declaring severally that none “born of woman” shall harm him, and that he shall never be vanquished till Birnam wood comes to Dunsinane hill. He knows both places well, and, reassured by these promises, fully believes he will die a peaceful death, and probably after a long and prosperous reign. Still, his jealous fear of the murdered Banquo, increased by the terror inspired by the victim's ghost, disturbs his mind, and he asks if Banquo's descendants will ever rule Scotland. His anxiety upon this point appears strange, for Malcolm and Donalbain are young; they have a right to the crown before both himself and Banquo, so there is every chance of themselves or their descendants claiming, if not obtaining, their ancestral rights before Banquo's family. The real Macbeth had one son,¹

¹ Scott's “History of Scotland.”

but he is never introduced in the play, nor do the Macbeths ever say who is the person they wish to be their heir. The witches, in reply to Macbeth's question about Banquo's posterity, for the first time seem hostile to his wishes. They tell him to ask no more, while the cauldron sinks into the ground. Macbeth angrily persists, and the witches, then speaking together, summon the figures of eight kings, who silently pass in order before them.

"WITCHES. Show his eyes, and grieve his heart ;
Come like shadows, so depart."

After the last figure enters Banquo, who smiles triumphantly at his murderer, while the eighth king carries a glass, in which Macbeth sees many following kings, and some bearing treble sceptres, indicative of the future union of England, Scotland, and Ireland under one monarch. Macbeth is in bewilderment, while the mocking witches dance round him, vanish, and never appear again. They have, indeed, done their work, and, with a power somewhat like that of Mephistopheles over Faust, have turned a brave, loyal general into a murderous usurper, or rather, have first inclined him to become such, for his final and more wicked temptress is his wife.¹ To her the witches never appear ; yet she is practically under their influence far more than her husband is. From the moment she

¹ "Macbeth is excitably imaginative, and his imagination alternately stimulates and enfeebles him. With Lady Macbeth to perceive is forthwith to decide ; to decide is to act."—Dowden's "Shakespeare : His Mind and Art."

hears of their prophecy on Forres heath, she believes it, urging Macbeth with all the ardour of her resolute spirit to commit a succession of crimes which she thinks necessary for its thorough fulfilment. The witches, though odious and malevolent, hating the whole human race, never suggested murder, or, indeed, any actual crime, to Macbeth's mind ; but he has now become so reckless, hardened, and unscrupulous that each subsequent atrocity seems easier than the last. Accordingly, when the witches vanish, and he hears of Macduff's flight to England, he resolves to slay Lady Macduff and her children. This horrid massacre is thus committed by his direct orders. The hapless lady is only once introduced with her eldest son, a bold, spirited lad, the first of the doomed family, who is slain by hired assassins. For committing this wholesale atrocity there seems little inducement, even to such a villain as Macbeth has now become : and there is no historical foundation for it in Holinshed's legends. It seems entirely Shakespeare's invention, who thus “on horror's head horrors accumulates.” Macduff's children are young—some, probably, girls—yet neither they nor their mother are spared.

After this dreadful event, Shakespeare changes the scene to England, describing a long conversation between Prince Malcolm and Macduff, the latter just arrived. This scene is taken almost literally from Holinshed's account, and, therefore, can hardly be considered Shakespeare's composition.¹ Malcolm, for some reason which he does not explain, describes

¹ Howard Staunton's notes to the “Illustrated Shakespeare.”

himself to Macduff as the most profligate, evil character possible, and then asks if such a person would be fit to rule. Macduff, evidently a brave, straightforward man, not particularly shrewd, believes Malcolm, and passionately bewails the fate of Scotland, thus claimed by a murderous usurper and the self-accusing young Prince beside him. In horrified indignation, Macduff then renounces allegiance to the son of his late sovereign, and contemplates abandoning Scotland, when Malcolm retracts his words, declaring he never meant what he said, and assures his faithful but shocked general that he will follow his guidance, adding that "devilish Macbeth" had often tried in former years to corrupt him. This statement is made by Holinshed, and is once mentioned by Shakespeare, but there is no allusion in the beginning of the play to any such conduct on Macbeth's part. It seems, indeed, inconsistent with his previous character—which was that of a brave and trusted officer of Duncan—to be all the time trying secretly to corrupt the mind of his young heir.

While Macduff is perplexed at Malcolm's sudden retraction of his self-description, a physician, belonging, probably, to King Edward's Court, tells Malcolm that many sick people are waiting to be cured by the touch of the excellent English monarch called Edward the Saint and Confessor.¹ The beautiful description which Malcolm gives of this virtuous sovereign to

¹ "Edward, to whom the monks gave the title of Saint and Confessor, was the first that touched for the king's evil; the opinion of his sanctity procured belief to this cure among the people."—Hume's "History," chap. iii.

the astonished Macduff is, indeed, a pleasing change from the guilt and mental misery of this terrible tragedy.

“ MALCOLM. A most miraculous work in this good King :
Which often, since my here-remain in England,
I have seen him do. How he solicits heaven,
Himself best knows : but strangely-visited people,
All swoln and ulcerous, pitiful to the eye,
The mere despair of surgery, he cures ;
Hanging a golden stamp about their necks,
Put on with holy prayers : and 'tis spoken,
To the succeeding royalty he leaves
The healing benediction. With this strange virtue,
He hath a heavenly gift of prophecy ;
And sundry blessings hang about his throne,
That speak him full of grace.”¹

Macduff has just heard it, when the dreadful massacre of his family is announced to him by his cousin, Lord Rosse. He is, of course, horrified and infuriated. Malcolm tries to console him, and, now thoroughly agreeing, the Prince and his two generals repair to King Edward, who, both in the play and in history, gave them practical assistance in liberating Scotland from the usurper.

The next act reverts in Scotland, to Dunsinane Castle, where the guilty Macbeths are preparing to resist the combined invading forces of Malcolm and Siward—the former commanding Scottish troops with Macduff, the latter heading the English. Lady

¹ “ His eyes were always fixed on the ground. There was a kind of magical charm in his thin white hands and his long transparent fingers which not unnaturally led to the belief that there resided in them a healing power of stroking away the diseases of his subjects.”—Stanley’s “ Westminster Abbey,” chap. i.

Macbeth's resolute mind has now given way, owing to bodily illness, caused by mental anxiety and intense disappointment. Had Macbeth been from the first as determined and remorseless as herself, she would probably have retained her naturally firm, hardened spirit to the last. But he is her only weak point, and she knew it.

" Yet I do fear thy nature ;
It is too full o' the milk of human kindness,"

she had exclaimed, after her joy at hearing the witches' prophecy. Ever since the first murder—even just before it—Macbeth had suffered from fits of horror and remorse, of which, while health remained, she appeared incapable. In the interval between the deaths of the King and Banquo, Macbeth reveals his remorse when alone with his wife, who never shares this feeling. Always trying to rouse him from depression, she asks :

" How now, my lord ? Why do you keep alone,
Of sorriest fancies your companions making,
Using those thoughts which should indeed have died
With them they think on ? . . .
What's done is done."

Macbeth, tormented by his conscience and knowing that the slain King has lawful sons and faithful subjects to revenge his murder, replies :

" We have scotch'd the snake, not kill'd it,
But let the frame of things disjoint, both the worlds suffer,
Ere we will eat our meal in fear and sleep

In the affliction of those terrible dreams,
That shake us nightly. Better be with the dead
Whom we to gain our place have sent to peace,
Than on the torture of the mind to lie,
In restless ecstasy.”

He then recalls with hopeless remorse his late sovereign and benefactor :

“ Duncan is in his grave.
After life’s fitful fever he sleeps well ;
Treason has done his worst, nor steel, nor poison,
Malice domestic, foreign levy, nothing
Can touch him further ! ”

Lady Macbeth rejoins, trying to cheer or rouse him :

“ Come on ;
Gentle my lord, sleek o’er your rugged looks.”

She had vainly tried, after Duncan’s murder, which she herself instigated, to inspire Macbeth with her own callousness of feeling. He obeyed her directions, followed her guidance, and promoted her views with almost frantic energy ; but his nature, as she had herself apprehended, he could not make like hers. He was haunted by terrors, anxieties, and fancies, which, while in bodily health, she altogether defied. The result was that his agitated mind soon became unfit to maintain his dangerous position as a successful usurper. Even in his brief time of peaceful triumph, his mind was tormented by the remembrance of Duncan’s murder, and by the fearful apparition of Banquo. In the midst of his military preparations he owns both to his follower, Lord Seyton, and to himself

that he is now weary of life, while exerting all his remaining energies of mind and body to defend it. He exclaims :

“I have liv’d long enough, my way of life
Is fallen into the sear and yellow leaf,
And that which should accompany old age,
As honour, love, obedience, troops of friends,
I must not look to have, but in their stead
Curses not loud but deep, mouth-honour, breath,
Which the poor heart would fain deny and dare not.”

When now really threatened by armed foes, led by his mortal enemies, Malcolm and Macduff, his bold spirit, though roused by new danger, no longer animates a firm, resolute mind. He has become an altered man—moody, violent, and fearful, yet still relying on the vague assurances of the witches about his own personal safety. To see his hopeless dejection, and the utter failure of all hopes of happiness, in the midst of apparent triumph, is, perhaps, the worst punishment which his hardened wife is capable of feeling. She has apparently neither male nor female confidant; her disappointment cannot be safely told to any one; all her energy she has vainly devoted to rouse and animate Macbeth, and, failing in these reiterated attempts, her health and mind give way at last. Even then her hard heart prevents her either repenting or seeking consolation from religion or faithful adherents. She does not consult or trust anybody, and her distracted state of mind is finally revealed in sleep, when, walking through her castle with a lighted taper, watched but not understood by

either her nurse or physician, she utters a confused soliloquy, and with sighs and groans retires to rest. Her words, even when unconscious, reveal what has really broken her stern spirit more than anything else could have done. It is evidently Macbeth's weakness, as she considers it—his fear and remorse—which, ruining their enterprise, have affected her reason. Her last words appeal to him, though she is still asleep, while her physician and servant vainly try to guess their real meaning.

“ LADY MACBETH. Fie, my lord, fie ! a soldier, and afeard ! What need we fear who knows it, when none can call our power to account ?—Yet who would have thought the old man to have had so much blood in him ! The Thane of Fife had a wife ; where is she now ? What, will these hands ne'er be clean ?—No more o' that, my lord, no more o' that : you mar all with this starting. . . . Here's the smell of the blood still : all the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten this little hand.—Oh ! Oh ! Oh ! ”

The physician exclaims, alarmed and wondering :

“ What a sigh is there ! The heart is sorely charged ” ;

while the maid naturally enough replies :

“ I would not have such a heart in my bosom, for the dignity of the whole body.”

Lady Macbeth, still fancying that her and her husband's hands are really as well as metaphorically blood-stained; proceeds :

“ Wash your hands, put on your night-gown ; look not so pale :—I tell you yet again, Banquo's buried ; he cannot come out of his

grave. To bed, to bed ; there's knocking at the gate. Come, come, come, come, give me your hand. What's done cannot be undone ; to bed, to bed, to bed. [Exit.]

[*Exit.*]

PHYSICIAN. Foul whisperings are abroad: unnatural deeds
Do breed unnatural troubles: infected minds
To their deaf pillows will discharge their secrets.
More needs she the divine than the physician.
God, God forgive us all! Look after her;
Remove from her the means of all annoyance,
And still keep eyes upon her."

Not a word of pity for her husband's victims escapes her ; no sign of contrition or of tenderness towards any one, or the least token of religious feeling. Her words convey merely a vague terror at being unable to efface bloodstains from her hands, while dreamily reiterating her previous entreaties to her absent husband to show neither fear, remorse, nor agitation. Her despair at Macbeth's incurable terrors, and at the consequent failure of her ambitious hopes and plans, has finally destroyed her strength of mind, and, with it, her bodily health. She is thenceforth

"Troubled with thick-coming fancies,
That keep her from her rest."

so her doctor states to Macbeth. The latter briefly urges him to quiet her, if possible; while he fears that he himself is likewise threatened with a similar state of mental despair, which he has hitherto somewhat resisted, owing to his desperate excitement about the coming battle.

Raze out the written troubles of the brain ;
And, with some sweet oblivious antidote,
Cleanse the stuff'd bosom of that perilous stuff,
Which weighs upon the heart ? ”

To this passionate appeal—which would perhaps have been more suitably addressed to a clergyman, or trusted friend, than to a medical man—the doctor, who does not pretend to understand the workings of a guilty conscience, calmly replies :

“ Therein the patient
Must minister to himself.”

Macbeth's bold spirit, roused if not relieved by the thoughts of immediate battle, fiercely rejoins :

“ Throw physic to the dogs, I'll none of it.—
Come, put mine armour on ; give me my staff.”

Then, recalling with renewed courage the words of the witches, which he still believes, he exclaims :

“ I will not be afraid of death and bane,
Till Birnam forest come to Dunsinane.”

Lady Macbeth soon after this scene either commits suicide—as the doctor had before apprehended, and which is vaguely intimated—or dies from the effects of despair. Meanwhile, Macbeth is distracted between his ever-tormenting conscience and his exertions to inspirit his army against the advancing foe. He is terribly excited, not trusting his followers—many of whom secretly incline to Prince Malcolm—

and often repeats the encouraging assurances he heard from the apparitions in the witches' cavern. He is told of his wife's death, while preparing to defend his castle against Malcolm. The fatal news has a strange effect on his troubled mind, now perplexed and excited to the last degree, though not yet in despair. He first exclaims :

“She should have died hereafter ;
There would have been a time for such a word”—

meaning probably when the coming enemy should have been defeated, which he still expects, and his power confirmed. The fact that her strong spirit is gone, that her voice will never more animate his courage, or rouse his ambition, plunges his mind into a brief yet wise reflection on the shortness and uncertainty of human life.

“MACBETH. To-morrow, and to-morrow, and to-morrow,
Creeps in this petty pace from day to day,
To the last syllable of recorded time ;
And all our yesterdays have lighted fools
The way to dusty death. Out, out, brief candle !
Life's but a walking shadow ; a poor player,
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage,
And then is heard no more : it is a tale
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
Signifying nothing.”

Yet neither his character nor position permits him to indulge long in such reflections. He is now startled by the strange news that his enemies have cut down Birnam wood, and are advancing, with its branches in their hands, upon the castle. He

storms at the messenger of this unwelcome news, and begins for the first time to distrust the witches. He exclaims :

“ I pull in resolution and begin,
To doubt the equivocation of the fiend,
That lies like truth.”

He recalls their words in fearful anxiety :

“ *Fear not till Birnam wood
Do come to Dunsinane*, and now a wood,
Comes towards Dunsinane ! Arm, arm and out !
If this which he avouches does appear,
There is nor flying hence, nor tarrying here.”

A brief sadness here assails his guilty mind amidst its fierce excitement, as he adds :

“ I 'gin to be a-weary of the sun,
And wish the state o' the world were now undone.”

Then, rousing his distracted mind to fearless desperation, he wildly exclaims :

“ Ring the alarm bell ! Blow, wind ! Come, wrack !
At least we'll die with harness on our back.”

Still he clings resolutely to his last hope—that none of woman born should vanquish him—and prepares for a desperate defence.

When attacked by his united English and Scotch foes, he kills Siward, the brave son of Northumberland, in single fight, thereby strengthening his fond

belief that no man shall slay him. Macduff vainly seeks him for some time, longing for vengeance on the murderer of his family. Just before they meet, Macbeth for the first time mentions suicide contemptuously, his passions being now thoroughly roused by the conflict. He scornfully alludes to the "Roman fools" who have thus ended their lives, and furiously declares that while he sees living foes—

" . . . the gashes
Do better upon them."

When uttering these words, Macduff meets and defies him. The furious tyrant at first rather shrinks from the encounter, telling his injured enemy that he himself bears a charmed life, which none born of woman can destroy. Macduff undauntedly bids him to distrust his charm, for that he who now challenges him to mortal combat was from his mother's womb "untimely ripp'd." This news for the moment quells Macbeth's spirit as much, though from a different cause, as when he trembled and grieved after Duncan's murder. He has now no longer his determined wife beside him to animate his courage. His brave foe, however, seeing his despair, and unwilling apparently to take unfair advantage of it, scornfully threatens him with being publicly paraded as a cruel monster, if he yields. This bitter taunt immediately rouses his passions, and Macbeth, in a last access of fury, defies his foe, with a desperate curse on whichever of them should yield. He is slain by his destined conqueror, who bears his

head—according to the savage custom of the times, and even of more recent ones—to the nominal victor, Prince Malcolm, whom, in the presence of North-umberland and many Scottish noblemen, Macduff proclaims King of Scotland.

“ Hail, King ! for so thou art : behold where stands
The usurper’s cursed head : the time is free !
I see thee compass’d with thy kingdom’s pearl,
That speak my salutation in their minds ;
Whose voices I desire aloud with mine—
—Hail, King of Scotland.
ALL. Hail, King of Scotland !”

It is remarkable that even to the end of this play no one save Macbeth, his wife, and Banquo seem personally to know about the appearance of the witches. The fact of Macbeth’s being literally “bewitched” and utterly changed from his former self is seldom mentioned. At the beginning of the play, he is termed “valiant cousin,” “worthy gentleman,” “noble Macbeth,” &c., by King Duncan, who rewards his loyal bravery with titles and honours : while his son and Macduff soon after have ample reason to term him, “This fiend of Scotland,” “Hellhound,” “Worse than any name,” “This dead butcher and his fiend-like Queen,” &c. Yet little surprise is shown by Malcolm or any of the Scottish chiefs at the almost miraculous change in Macbeth’s conduct and character.

King Malcolm’s words end this play, inviting all present to his approaching coronation at Scone, and mentioning the rumour, which he apparently believes,

of Lady Macbeth's suicide. Throughout this tragedy Malcolm is seldom introduced, but all he says and does proclaims him a sensible and virtuous Prince, which his subsequent conduct as King fully proved.¹ His friendship with the excellent King of England, Edward the Confessor, and his liking for English ways, manners, and customs—then, probably, more civilised than those of Scotland—raised him far above the fierce, turbulent thanes and chiefs of that country, which he appears to have ruled with justice and success.

¹ Scott's "History of Scotland," chap. iii.

III

“*KING JOHN*” (A.D. 1199)

SHAKESPEARE'S earliest yet slight allusion to English history is in *Macbeth*, when mentioning Edward the Confessor, and rather more than a hundred and fifty years of his country's history had elapsed before the great poet again describes it. During this interval, the Norman rule over England and part of Ireland had commenced and was thoroughly confirmed. Six French or Norman Kings had reigned and disappeared, and the seventh, King John, was now ruling over England—his mother, Elinor, assisting him with her counsel, favour, and experience. She was, from all accounts, a woman of uncommon spirit and resolution, and her fierce temper instantly resents the haughty language of the French envoy Chatillon when terming her favourite son's regal power “borrowed majesty.”

Macaulay writes of this unfortunate King: “Had John inherited the great qualities of his father . . . and had the King of France at the same time been as incapable as all the other successors of Hugh Capet had been, the House of Plantagenet must have risen

to unrivalled ascendancy in Europe. But just at this conjuncture France for the first time since the death of Charlemagne was governed by a prince of great firmness and ability. On the other hand, England, which since the battle of Hastings had been ruled generally by wise statesmen, always by brave soldiers, fell under the dominion of a trifler and a coward" ("History of England," chap. i.).

John, who, amid all his evil qualities, always loved his mother as much as he was capable of loving any one, begs her to be silent, while he returns a defiant answer to the equally defiant words of King Philip of France. After Chatillon departs, Elinor lays all the blame of Philip's hostility on the ambition of her hated daughter-in-law, Constance, now with her son Arthur at the Court of France.

"QUEEN ELINOR. What now, my son? have I not ever said,
How that ambitious Constance would not cease,
Till she had kindled France, and all the world,
Upon the right and party of her son?

KING JOHN. Our strong possession, and our right, for us.

ELINOR. Your strong possession much more than your right;
Or else it must go wrong with you and me:
So much my conscience whispers in your ear;
Which none but Heaven, and you, and I, shall hear."

John, while contemplating an attack on France, reveals his plan for plundering the priories and abbeys of England, exclaiming :

"Our abbeys and our priories shall pay
This expedition's charge."

This scheme, despite great opposition, he strove to accomplish, with the fatal obstinacy of his character.

In the next scene there occurs a curious dispute between two half-brothers, which is brought before King John and his mother, who, somewhat like modern judges, hear and decide the case. The disputants bear the name of Faulconbridge. The elder was disinherited by his supposed father, Sir Robert, who declared his belief to the younger that his brother was a son of the late King Richard Cœur-de-Lion. This case greatly interests Elinor and John, for they recognise in the gallant bearing, noble figure, and frank manner of Philip Faulconbridge their late son and brother, to whom John had every reason to be grateful for unmerited generosity. They well know that no danger to their power could arise from an illegitimate relative; that the bar sinister prevents the least chance of rivalry more than perhaps anything else could do; and yet Richard I. in many ways again stands before them—young, respectful, and completely devoted to their interests. Such a valuable friend and adherent is, indeed, precious at this time, when they are threatened by the chivalrous French King espousing the rightful cause of the injured Prince Arthur. Accordingly, John knights Philip Faulconbridge by the name of Sir Richard Plantagenet, while Elinor, greeting him yet more eagerly, calls herself his grandmother, and asks him to call her so.

“QUEEN ELINOR. I am thy grandame, Richard; call me so.

BASTARD. Madam, by chance, but not by truth: what though?
Something about, a little from the right,
In at the window, or else o'er the hatch.”

The young knight thus respectfully demurs, with the

singular modesty and frankness which mark his peculiarly interesting character, and prepares to accompany the King and Queen-mother to France, while cheerfully congratulating his younger brother on obtaining his father's lands, which was the cause of their dispute ; for the bastard is now a "landless knight," while his brother is a "landed squire."

The newly-made knight when alone amusingly mentions his new dignity :

"A foot of honour better than I was,
But many a foot of land the worse.
Well now can I make any Joan a lady."

Then, imitating some future greeting to himself, and his own proud answer :

"*Good-den, Sir Richard,—God-a-mercy, fellow !
And if his name be George I'll call him Peter,
For new made honour doth forget men's names,
'Tis too respective¹ and too sociable
For your conversion.*"

He then announces this change to his mother, Lady Faulconbridge, who, on hearing it, admits that he is her son by the late King.

When she hears that he has "denied himself a Falconbridge" before Queen Elinor and King John, she confesses what may have been her misfortune more than her fault, considering the arbitrary power of Richard I. and the semi-barbarism of the time :

¹ Considerate."—Staunton's notes.

“ King Richard Cœur-de-Lion was thy father.
By long and vehement suit I was seduc’d
Heaven lay not my transgression to my charge !
Thou art the issue of my dear offence,
Which was so strongly urg’d, past my defence.”

He replies, doubtless full of new ambitions, hopes, and thoughts :

“ Madam, I would not wish a better father,
Some sins do bear their privilege on earth,
And so doth yours : your fault was not your folly ;
Needs must you lay your heart at his dispose,
Subjected tribute to commanding love,
Against whose fury and unmatched force
The aweless lion would not wage the fight,
Nor keep his princely heart from Richard’s hand.
He that perforce robs lions of their hearts,
May easily win a woman’s.”

Act II. changes to France, where King Philip II., allied with the Archduke of Austria, and accompanied by his son, the Dauphin Lewis, are assembled, together with the Princess Constance and her son Arthur. These three foreign Princes now unite in hatred to King John, and in the wish to obtain for Arthur his royal rights.¹ It is certain, however, that Philip’s own interests chiefly incline him to this policy ; for then John ruled several French provinces, some—perhaps all—of which the former would probably claim and receive from Arthur, in return for his assistance in case of success. Philip is

¹ Bishop Wordsworth, in his notes to “Shakespeare’s Historical Plays,” says that King John was not considered a usurper of his nephew’s rights at this period ; and adds, “ John was bad enough, without having to bear the blame of faults which were not his.”

throughout a chivalrous, yet very politic prince, and was, indeed, one of the wisest kings who ever occupied the French throne.¹ His envoy, Chatillon, announces the landing of John, with the undaunted Queen-mother, her niece the Princess Blanche, and also the newly-knighted Richard Plantagenet, with other English noblemen and officers, whom he calls

“Rash, inconsiderate, fiery volunteers.”

The two Kings, with their respective allies, relations, and adherents, then meet, exchanging angry defiances, during which Philip again charges John with usurping Arthur’s rights. The rival Queen and Princess, Elinor and Constance—both proud, ambitious, and devoted to their respective sons’ conflicting interests—reproach each other bitterly, the bastard Richard rather diverting himself by ridiculing and taunting the proud, dull Austrian Archduke. In this scene, Queen Elinor mentions having a will, which she declares would bar Arthur’s right of succession, and this Constance scornfully denies.

“QUEEN ELINOR.

Come to thy grandame, child.

CONSTANCE. Do, child ; go to it grandame, child ;

Give grandame kingdom, and it grandame will

Give it a plum, a cherry, and a fig :

There’s a good grandame.

PRINCE ARTHUR.

Good my mother, peace !

¹ “No prince comparable to him in systematic ambition and military enterprise had reigned in France since Charlemagne. From his reign the French monarchy dates the recovery of its lustre.”—Hallam’s “Middle Ages,” vol. i.

I would that I were low laid in my grave ;
I am not worth this coil that's made for me.

ELINOR. His mother shames him so, poor boy, he weeps.

CONSTANCE. Now shame upon you, whe'r she does, or no !
His grandame's wrongs, and not his mother's shames,
Draw those heaven-moving pearls from his poor eyes,
Which heaven shall take in nature of a fee ;
Ay, with these crystal beads heaven shall be brib'd
To do him justice, and revenge on you.

ELINOR. Thou monstrous slanderer of heaven and earth !

CONSTANCE. Thou monstrous injurer of heaven and earth !
Call not me slanderer ; thou and thine, usurp
The dominations, royalties, and rights
Of this oppressed boy.

ELINOR. Thou unadvised scold, I can produce
A will, that bars the title of thy son.

CONSTANCE. Ay, who doubts that ? a will ! a wicked will ;
A woman's will ; a cankered grandame's will !

KING PHILIP. Peace, lady ; pause, or be more temperate.”

This document, however, was probably the late King Richard's first will, who appears to have desired John's succession in preference to his nephew, though surely he had no more right than any other English monarch to name a successor contrary to law.¹

The angry language which Elinor and Constance use, though coarse and abusive, seems consistent enough with the fierce, violent temper of the old Queen ; while history says little about Constance, whose injurious reproaches Elinor seems to have

¹ Hume states that Richard I. made two wills—the first declaring Arthur his heir, the second naming John instead, which change he considers was probably caused by Queen Elinor, who really hated Constance as vehemently as represented in this play. Hume adds : “The authority of a testament was great in that age, even where the succession to a kingdom was concerned” (“History of England,” vol. i., chap. i.).

somewhat deserved, though peculiarly irritating to hear from her own daughter-in-law.¹ Philip silences them, in words rather too abrupt and rude for a polished French monarch—

“Women and fools break off your conference”—

and a battle begins between the French and English armies, when John's devoted Norman follower, Hubert de Burgh, proposes a peace, by marrying the Dauphin Louis to the Princess Blanche, daughter to the King of Castile, and niece to King John, the latter agreeing to create Arthur Duke of Bretagne, and to give him French territory now held by England. This plan, which, perhaps, might, under the circumstances, have been a happy one, is warmly denounced by Constance (Act II.), who will be satisfied with nothing less than the restitution of her son's rights, and the consequent deposition of the reigning English King. In vain Philip of France tries to reconcile her to the

¹ According to Hume, Queen Elinor's antecedents were little fitted to bear severe handling. She was married when very young to Louis VII. of France, and went on a crusade with him to Syria, where, being suspected of “gallantry with a handsome Saracen,” Lewis divorced her, and she then, about six weeks after, married Prince Henry of England, afterwards Henry II., though much older than he. She “who had disgusted her first husband by her gallantries was no less offensive to her second by her jealousy, and after this manner carried to extremity, in the different periods of her life, every circumstance of female weakness” (“History of England,” vol. i.). Shakespeare's account of her rather agrees with history. Her strong affection for her son John, however, was constant, and sincerely returned by him, during his troubled reign, while living together in perpetual danger and insecure power.

project. She wildly appeals to his sense of honour, while scornfully reproaching the Austrian Archduke for, as she thinks, abandoning her son's cause.

In the midst of this violent scene, a new personage appears, destined to take a very decided part both in history and in the play. This is Cardinal Pandulf, sent by Pope Innocent III. to insist upon King John's allowing Stephen Langton to be installed Archbishop of Canterbury.¹ Pandulf, evidently a resolute and conscientious man, occupies, amid these fierce kings and their warlike followers, a singularly grand position.² Yet his imperious demand irritates John more than all the passionate reproaches of Constance, and he replies by angrily denouncing not only the Pope's right to appoint bishops in England, but also his spiritual supremacy generally. This language John probably neither used nor wished to use, and in his position, unassisted by theologians

¹ Both Mr. Stubbs and Mr. Green, in their recent English histories, agree with Hume in praising this excellent prelate, whose high character and attainments were evidently appreciated by Pope Innocent, but were no recommendations to King John's favour.

² Macaulay's remarks, though probably intended for previous reigns to that of King John, seem still applicable to his period: “The childhood of the European nations was passed under the tutelage of the clergy. The ascendancy of the sacerdotal order was long the ascendancy which naturally and properly belongs to intellectual superiority. The priests, with all their faults, were by far the wisest portion of society. It was, therefore, on the whole, good that they should be respected and obeyed” (Macaulay's “History of England,” vol. i.). Mr. Green makes similar remarks respecting English public feeling during King John's reign, which he says decidedly supported Pandulf in his conduct to John (“History of the English People,” vol. i. i.).

and unsupported by public opinion, it would have been to no purpose ; for at this time few, if any, in England would have sanctioned his words, except the Jews, to whom he certainly never thought of appealing, save to obtain money, occasionally by force or torture. The French King, shrewd and politic, is shocked at the words of his royal brother ; while Pandulf, without condescending to argument, threatens John with excommunication. In this menace he is eagerly joined by the vehement Constance, who passionately declares that unless her wrongs are considered—

“No tongue hath power to curse him right.”

The Cardinal, rather embarrassed, if not scandalised, at the vehemence of this eager ally, gravely assures her that

“There is law and warrant”

for *his* curse, thus drawing a marked, important distinction between the Papal malediction he pronounces in due form and the violent wrath of this enraged Princess. The Pope apparently had no idea of denying John’s right to the English Crown, or of acknowledging Prince Arthur, which, perhaps, was a great disappointment to Constance, and a surprise to the French King. However, John’s obstinacy in resisting the Pope’s authority immediately renews war between France and England, Pandulf all the time denouncing John, while carefully abstain-

ing from openly favouring Arthur's claims. The King, after his defiance of the Pope, proceeds, authorising his newly-knighted nephew to plunder the English monasteries and abbeys in these decisive words, and his conduct, if not his language, is confirmed by history. While yet in France he exclaims to Falconbridge :

“ Cousin, away for England ; haste before,
And ere our coming see thou shake the bags
Of hoarding abbots . . .
Use our commission in his utmost force.”

His loyal but reckless adherent, delighted at this unscrupulous order, and likely foreseeing some gain to himself in its execution, eagerly replies :

“ Bell, book, and candle shall not drive me back,
When gold and silver beck me to come on.”

During this war, Arthur is captured by John, who commits him to the charge of Hubert de Burgh. This man—brave, trusty, and quite devoted to him—John resolves shall be the instrument for destroying his nephew, and, accordingly, has a private interview with this adherent, in which he states his fears of the Prince, and suggests his murder with nervous eagerness.

“ KING JOHN. Good Hubert, Hubert, Hubert, throw thine
eye
On yon young boy : I'll tell thee what, my friend,
He is a very serpent in my way ;
And wheresoe'er this foot of mine doth tread

He lies before me : dost thou understand me ?
Thou art his keeper.

HUBERT. And I'll keep him so,
That he shall not offend your Majesty.

KING JOHN. Death.

HUBERT. My lord ?

KING JOHN. A grave.

HUBERT. He shall not live.

KING JOHN. Enough.

I could be merry now : Hubert, I love thee.

Well, I'll not say what I intend for thee :

Remember."

John evidently longs for Arthur's death, yet hesitates as to how he could be safely disposed of, he himself being most unpopular in England ; for nobles, clergy, and people dislike him, and he knows it.¹ If, therefore, it were known that Arthur was murdered by him, the result might be as dangerous to him as the Prince's escape. History and Shakespeare apparently agree in this, for though Arthur was supposed to be slain by John's own hand,² yet his fate was never known for certain ; while Shakespeare makes the unscrupulous King tempt Hubert to slay him with eager, nervous, yet artful entreaties, appealing alike to his love, gratitude, and self-interest.³ Hubert,

¹ "King John trusted no man, and no man trusted him."—Stubbs's "Constitutional History," vol. i. Yet Shakespeare makes him place great confidence in his illegitimate nephew, Richard Plantagenet ; but for this there appears no historical foundation.

² Hume's "History," vol. i.

³ "He trembles lest he should have said too much ; he trembles lest he should not have said enough ; at last the nearer fear prevails, and the words, 'Death,' 'A grave,' form themselves upon his lips. Having touched a spring which will produce assassination, he furtively withdraws himself from the mechanism of crime."—Dowden's "Shakespeare's Mind and Art," chap. iv.

gratified by John's confidence, listens respectfully, and satisfies the anxious King that his young rival shall “not live,” without actually naming assassination.

The next scene introduces the unfortunate Constance, grieving for her captured child before King Philip and Cardinal Pandulf. She evidently expects the worst, for she never solicits the French monarch's power nor the Cardinal's influence in behalf of her son, but considers him already dead, and despairingly declares she shall never see him again. Though Constance, in utter despair, wishes herself dead, she never hints at suicide, which some people have committed from less mental misery than she wildly expresses. The Cardinal, who has doubtless beheld deep sorrow in many forms during his ecclesiastical life, and often known it to lead to religious seclusion, is evidently surprised at her frantic language, and exclaims :

“Lady, you utter madness, and not sorrow.

CONSTANCE. Thou art not holy to belie me so ;
I am not mad : this hair I tear is mine ;
My name is Constance ; I was Geoffrey's wife ;
Young Arthur is my son, and he is lost ;
I am not mad ;—I would to heaven I were !
For then 'tis like I should forget myself :
O, if I could, what grief should I forget !—

I am not mad ; too well, too well I feel
The different plague of each calamity.”

Then, when Pandulf calmly observes :

“ You hold too heinous a respect of grief,”

the bereaved mother almost proudly replies :

“ He talks to me that never had a son.”

Neither Philip nor Pandulf can offer much consolation, though the former attempts it ; while the Cardinal soon after has a remarkable interview with the Dauphin Louis, who loves the Princess Blanche, and is beloved by her.

This French Prince is described as both a sentimental and an irritable young man, and the secret comments of the frank, open Faulconbridge on his high-flown language would likely much amuse an English audience. When asked by his father, King Philip, to

“ Look in the lady’s face,”

he enthusiastically replies :

“ I do, my lord, and in her eye I find
A wonder, or a wondrous miracle,
The shadows of myself form’d in her eye,
Which being but the shadow of your son,
Becomes a sun and makes your son a shadow.
I do protest, I never lov’d myself,
Till now infixed I beheld myself
Drawn in the flattering table¹ of her eye ! ”

Upon these fantastic words Faulconbridge makes private and sarcastic remarks :

“ Drawn in the flattering table of her eye !
Hang’d in the frowning wrinkle of her brow ;
And quarter’d in her heart !—he doth espy

¹ “ Picture.”—Staunton’s notes.

Himself love's traitor : this is pity now,
That hang'd and drawn and quarter'd, there should be
In such a love, so vile a lout as he."

The observant Cardinal foresees Arthur's death by the order of John, with whom all the clergy are more displeased than ever, since he empowered his reckless nephew, Richard, to plunder the English abbeys and monasteries. This strange commission Richard was executing with the eager impetuosity of his fiery nature ; but it was in every way a most impolitic act, as it irritated the clergy, without apparently conciliating or pleasing any section of the King's subjects. Pandulf, knowing the popular discontent, urges Louis to invade England with a French force, believing he would soon be joined by numbers of John's disaffected subjects. In this belief he was right, for at present the Normans, now paramount in England, considered themselves almost Frenchmen, despising the subjected Saxons, who, in their turn, hated John's Norman origin as well as his character.¹

¹ “ It is certain that when John became King, the distinction between Saxon and Norman was strongly marked, and that before the end of the reign of his grandson it had almost disappeared. In the time of Richard I., the ordinary imprecation of a Norman gentleman was, ‘ May I become an Englishman ! ’ His ordinary form of indignant denial was, ‘ Do you take me for an Englishman ? ’ The descendant of such a gentleman, a hundred years later, was proud of the English name.”—Macaulay's “ History of England,” vol. i., chap. i. This passage well explains the different position of the French in this play from what they occupy in Shakespeare's other historical plays, describing a later period, as more than the century which Macaulay mentions elapsed between King John's death and Richard II.'s accession, whose reign is the next that Shakespeare presents in historical course.

The Cardinal asks Louis, after the capture of Prince Arthur by King John :

“Are not you grieved that Arthur is his prisoner?”

The French prince humanely answers :

“As heartily as he is glad he hath him.”

The Cardinal proceeds, evidently well informed about the present state of England, as the future proved :

“Now hear me speak with a prophetic spirit.

John hath seized Arthur ; and it cannot be
That whilsts warm life plays in the infant’s veins
The misplac’d John should entertain an hour,
One minute, nay, one quiet breath of rest.

That John may stand then, Arthur needs must fall.”

The Dauphin asks :

“But what shall I gain by young Arthur’s fall?”

and Pandulf replies :

“You in the right of Lady Blanche, your wife,
May then make all the claim that Arthur did

John lays you plots ; the times conspire with you ;—
For he that steeps his safety in true blood,
Shall find but bloody safety and untrue.”

Then Pandulf, alluding to the certainty of Prince

Arthur's approaching murder by King John, proceeds with truth :

“ This act so evilly borne shall cool the hearts
Of all his people and freeze up their zeal,
That none so small advantage shall step forth
To check his reign but they will cherish it.”

Then, describing English superstitions about John's unfortunate reign :

“ No natural exhalation in the sky,
No scope of nature, no distemper'd day,
No common wind, no customed event,
But they will pluck away his natural cause,
And call them meteors, prodigies, and signs,
Abortives, presages and tongues of heaven,
Plainly denouncing vengeance upon John.”

Finally, referring to the plunder of the Church's property, which Pandulf views with extreme and natural indignation, he continues :

“ The bastard Falconbridge
Is now in England ransacking the church,
Offending charity. If but a dozen French
Were there in arms they would be as a call
To train ten thousand English to their side.”

Louis agrees to this proposal, and they then consult King Philip, who was, indeed, well qualified both in character and position to direct any such enterprise.

The fourth act opens, perhaps, with the most pathetic scene in the whole play. It has, however, no historical foundation, though Arthur's mysterious disappearance might well cause, if not justify, any

sad story about him. Hubert de Burgh, with two attendants, tells the little captive that he has orders to blind him, while Arthur, represented as a quiet, melancholy child, entreats him to forbear. Hubert shows him a warrant, apparently for this horrid object, but it was never mentioned by John in his interview with the former, though the King, indeed, clearly intimated that nothing short of the Prince's death would serve his purpose or make his throne secure. Arthur, however, pleads so eloquently that Hubert relents, and does him no injury, despite his grateful attachment to the King.

The following scene introduces John being crowned a second time before several dissatisfied, murmuring English noblemen, who, uneasy at Arthur's imprisonment, now demand his liberation. John is forced to answer them more mildly than he wishes, owing to the general discontent, which, with a threatened French invasion, makes his rule very insecure. He promises to release Arthur, when Hubert, entering secretly, informs him of the Prince's death, which John then announces to the indignant noblemen, some of whom vaguely hint at insurrection, and leave his presence. John, not having the courage of his brave family, and knowing his unpopularity with clergy, nobility, and commons, suddenly regrets authorising Arthur's death, not from humanity, but from fears for his own life, which he now thinks would be safer had the prince been kept in close captivity or well guarded. While he is in great agitation, news is brought of the

coming invasion, headed by the Dauphin Louis. He eagerly asks after his mother, Elinor, who had remained in France, representing his power and devoted to his interests, but hears of her unexpected death.

“ KING JOHN. Where is my mother’s care,
That such an army could be drawn in France,
And she not hear of it ?

MESSENGER. My liege, her ear
Is stopped with dust ; the first of April, died
Your noble mother. . . .

KING JOHN. Withhold thy speed, dreadful occasion !
O, make a league with me, till I have pleas’d
My discontented peers !—What ! mother dead ?
How wildly, then, walks my estate in France !”

His dismay is at his height, for Elinor seemed to combine in herself the courage of his elder brother, Cœur-de-Lion, with a shrewdness which neither Richard nor he possessed, and these qualities she, even in old age, devoted to his cause.¹

John suffers at this moment from as much sorrow and regret as his hardened nature is capable of feeling, but these emotions never soften his heart, for, while still grieving at the fatal news, his nephew, Richard, brings him, as a prisoner, a certain eccentric hermit, called Peter of Pomfret, who, perhaps reckoning on John’s unpopularity as well as upon his quarrel with the Pope, had rashly foretold that on next Ascension Day the King should yield up his crown. John, in

¹ “ King John had in his mother, Queen Elinor, though near eighty, a counsellor of much experience in continental politics, of great energy, and devoted faithfulness.”—Stubbs’s “ Constitutional History,” vol. i.

vicious anger, apparently unchecked by law or remonstrance, orders his faithful officer, Hubert, to have Peter executed on the very day he had named, and to keep him imprisoned till these cruel orders were carried out.¹ Richard then tells John of the secret suspicions now rife among the nobility about Arthur's death by his order, and the perplexed King instantly sends him with soothing messages to them, being dismayed at the double dangers impending—of domestic revolt and foreign invasion. Hubert has a private interview with his distracted, guilty sovereign, in which he describes the increasing anger of the people, and their indignation at the suspected murder of Arthur. Shakespeare, instead of introducing a scene among the lower classes—which he could have done so admirably, and would have been an interesting change—makes Hubert describe them with a graphic power that effectually terrifies the nervous King.

“HUBERT. Young Arthur's death is common in their mouths :
And when they talk of him, they shake their heads,
And whisper one another in the ear ;
And he that speaks doth gripe the hearer's wrist ;
Whilst he that hears makes fearful action,
With wrinkled brows, with nods, with rolling eyes.
I saw a smith stand with a hammer, thus,
The whilst his iron did on the anvil cool,
With open mouth swallowing a tailor's news,
Who, with his shears and measure in his hand,
Standing on slippers (which his nimble haste
Had falsely thrust upon contrary feet),

¹ Hume's “History,” vol. i.

Told of a many thousand warlike French,
That were embattled and rank'd in Kent :
Another lean unwashed artifcer
Cuts off his tale, and talks of Arthur's death.

KING JOHN. Why seek'st thou to possess me with these fears ?
Why urgest thou so oft young Arthur's death ? ”

John's stern yet sensitive nature is curiously revealed in this scene. He believes that Hubert has already slain Arthur by his orders, and, completely overcome by grief and terror—the former caused by his mother's death, the latter by his own perils—he tries, in nervous, petulant anger, more like that of a fretful child than a man, to lay the blame of Arthur's supposed murder on Hubert's too eager obedience to his vague intimations.¹

Hubert's personal appearance was evidently what is commonly called “against him,” or, as Charles Dickens wittily remarks of an imaginary person, “he might have brought an action against his face for defamation of character, and recovered heavy damages.” John, knowing that Hubert is wholly

¹ Macaulay terms John “a trifler and a coward” (“History of England,” chap. i.), and in this scene he certainly merits both appellations, yet during his eventful life he displayed considerable energy. Shakespeare's account of him in age—moody, suspicious, fearful, and violent by turns—resembles Scott's description in “Ivanhoe,” when a petulant young prince, “flushing with the pride of a spoilt child,” tempting, flattering, and irritating his best friends, and thus often losing all influence over them. Hume's account (vol. i.) is, if possible, more odious and contemptible than that of the poet or the novelist. A more recent historian, however, declares that, “with all his vices, he yet possessed all the quickness, vivacity, cleverness, good-humour, and social charm which distinguished his House,” and that he was the ablest prince of his family (Green's “History of the English People,” chap. i.).

in his power, owing to his devotion to himself, and having doubtless made many enemies in consequence, has the final meanness to reproach him for it, having previously tried to lay all the blame of Arthur's suspected assassination upon him.

“KING JOHN. Thy hand hath murder'd him : I had a mighty cause

To wish him dead, but thou hadst none to kill him.

HUBERT. No had, my lord ! why, did you not provoke me ?

KING JOHN. It is the curse of kings, to be attended
By slaves that take their humours for a warrant
To break within the bloody house of life ;
And, on the winking of authority,
To understand a law.”

Then Hubert, with steady calmness, shows the guilty monarch his “hand and seal.” The sight of this apparently forgotten document completes, for the moment, John’s mental prostration.

“KING JOHN. O, when the last account 'twixt Heaven and earth
Is to be made, then shall this hand and seal
Witness against us to damnation !
How oft the sight of means to do ill deeds
Makes ill deeds done ! Hadst thou not been by,
A fellow by the hand of nature mark'd,
Quoted, and signed, to do a deed of shame,
This murder had not come into my mind :
But, taking note of thy abhor'd aspect,
Finding thee fit for bloody villainy,
Apt, liable, to be employ'd in danger,
I faintly broke with thee of Arthur's death ;
And thou, to be endeared to a king,
Made it no conscience to destroy a prince.”

Yet even then the fiery spirit of his family soon rouses him from depression to rage, and he orders Hubert away at once, which touches with compassion,

instead of irritating, his faithful adherent, who is, indeed, worthy of a better king. Hubert hears John's vehement—even foolish—reproaches with the steady self-control of one devotedly loyal to the noble Plantagenet family, and personally grateful to its present unworthy representative. For in the conscience-struck prince before him, Hubert still sees the incarnate majesty of England, though surrounded by dangers menacing the whole kingdom with himself. Hubert, with calm dignity, and having, as it were, justly punished his wicked tempter by letting him believe his cruel orders were executed, now declares that Arthur is alive. John, who before had so eagerly desired his nephew's death, hears the news with relief, hastily apologises for his words to Hubert, and sends him to announce Arthur's safety to the “ discontented peers.”

The next scene describes the unfortunate prince escaping from his prison, and killed by a fall from the walls. This account is Shakespeare's invention, nor does he say if Hubert, in whose charge he is, has furnished the “ ship-boy's dress ” in which he tries to escape; but he has evidently had assistance. His body is found by some English noblemen, and also by Richard Plantagenet, who, with Lord Salisbury, fiercely charges his keeper with having slain Arthur. Hubert eagerly defends himself, and is at last believed, after having been sternly reproached by Sir Richard, who at first suspects him “ grievously.” Richard's conduct about Arthur is not very consistent; for Shakespeare makes him

nearly as devoted as Hubert to King John, and yet to have the sincerest respect, as well as pity, for his victim. Both he and Hubert are, indeed, brave, patriotic, honest Englishmen, yet strangely obedient to a mean-spirited, yet in some respects energetic sovereign, whose character and motives, were he not their King, they would surely abhor and despise to the last degree.

Act V. introduces, in Shakespeare's brilliant style, the historical episode of John's humiliation before Cardinal Pandulf, the able, resolute representative of Pope Innocent III.¹ The part which Pandulf plays at this time is very remarkable, both in history and in this tragedy. He mingles with quarrelling kings, fierce nobles, and their armed retainers, as if bearing a charmed life—fearless, observant, determined, and exacting, or unwillingly obtaining, the respect of all. Yet he is always labouring for the interests of the Church he represents, and never for private purposes. He compels John to yield up the English Crown, which he returns to him, observing that he now holds it by the Pope's authority. John, no longer defiant, entreats him to use his potent influence to stop the French invasion ; for, being now recognised

¹ "John came into the legate's presence, who was seated on a throne ; he flung himself on his knees before him ; he lifted up his joined hands and put them within those of Pandulf ; he swore fealty to the Pope ; and he paid part of the tribute which he owed for his kingdom as the patrimony of St. Peter. The legate, elated by this supreme triumph of sacerdotal power, could not forbear discovering extravagant symptoms of joy and exultation. He trampled on the money which was laid at his feet as an earnest of the subjection of the kingdom."—Hume's "History," vol. i.

as King by the Pope, John naturally reckons upon the Church's assistance to maintain his power.

“ KING JOHN. Now keep your holy word : go meet the French ;
And from his holiness use all your power
To stop their marches, 'fore we are inflam'd.
Our discontented counties do revolt ;
Our people quarrel with obedience ;
Swearing allegiance, and the love of soul,
To stranger blood, to foreign royalty.
This inundation of mistemper'd humour
Rests by you only to be qualified.

PANDULF. It was my breath that blew this tempest up,
Upon your stubborn usage of the Pope :
But, since you are a gentle convertite,
My tongue shall hush again this storm of war,
And make fair weather in your blustering land.
On this Ascension Day, remember well,
Upon your oath of service to the Pope,
Go I to make the French lay down their arms.”

Pandulf agrees, telling John to remember this Ascension Day, when he had publicly submitted to the Pope's authority. The King now recollects and believes the prophecy of the luckless Peter of Pomfret, but that unfortunate hermit was nevertheless executed, without either priest or layman apparently making any effort to save him.¹ During this important scene, Pandulf probably calls to mind the former contests between the Plantagenet Kings and the clergy, and the murder of Thomas a'Becket by the instigation, if not orders, of John's father. But having now brought the obstinate, yet nervous King completely under the Pope's rule, the zealous Cardinal

¹ “ Though the man pleaded that his prophecy was fulfilled, the defence was supposed to aggravate his guilt.”—Hume's “ History,” vol. i.

has no wish to see him dethroned by the invading French Dauphin. On the contrary, he resolves to do all he can to preserve John's power, now that it is restrained by the Pope's supreme authority.¹ He thus leaves the King, promising to make peace between France and England, or, rather, between the French, allied with many of the English, with those who still adhere to John; and after he has gone, Sir Richard enters. This warlike gentleman has perhaps less respect for Pandulf than the other personages manifest; but they never dispute, or a stormy scene would doubtless ensue. Richard, now excited by war and irritated at the French invasion, earnestly counsels John in almost peremptory language to have no treaty with the enemy, and to resist them to the last. The King, whose secret wishes are perhaps with him, hears his energetic language, without, however, sharing any of its animation. He seems, indeed, so completely overwhelmed by the dangers around him, and by the recent agitation

¹ "In after times men believed that England thrilled at the news with a sense of national shame, such as she had never felt before. 'He has become the Pope's man,' the whole country was said to have murmured; 'he has forfeited the very name of king; from a free man he has degraded himself into a serf.' But this was the belief of a time still to come, when the rapid growth of national feeling, which this step and its issues did more than anything to foster, made men look back on the scene between John and Pandulf as a national dishonour. We see little trace of such a feeling in the contemporary accounts of the time. All seem rather to have regarded it as a complete settlement of the difficulties in which King and kingdom were involved. As a political measure, its success was immediate and complete. The French army at once broke up in impotent rage."—Green's "History of the English People," book iii.

caused by his mother's death, that he hears his reckless young adviser with a sort of feeble admiration. In him he doubtless perceives and remembers the dauntless character of his heroic brother of the “lion heart,” so different from his own nervous, if not craven spirit. That very same fearless heroism, which in the late King had been the obstacle to John's ambition and check to his hopes, was now in the bastard nephew devoted heart and soul to his service. He merely answers :

“ Have thou the ordering of this present time,”

but those few words reveal both his own dejection and his admiring confidence in young Richard, in whom he recognises, perhaps with feelings of personal shame, the high spirit of their gallant race.

The next scenes describe important conferences between the ambitious Dauphin Louis and his English ally, Lord Salisbury, and also with Pandulf, who insists on the war being abandoned and John's authority acknowledged, owing to his peace with the Pope. Louis, disappointed and vexed at being thus suddenly stopped in what promises to be a successful war, for some time resists and almost defies the Cardinal.

“ PANDULF. King John hath reconcil'd
Himself to Rome ; his spirit is come in,
That so stood out against the holy Church,
The great metropolis and see of Rome :
Therefore thy threat'ning colours now wind up,
And tame the savage spirit of wild war ;
That, like a lion foster'd up at hand,

It may lie gently at the foot of peace,
And be no further harmful than in show.

LOUIS. Your breath first kindled the dead coal of wars
Between this chas'tis'd kingdom and myself,
And brought in matter that should feed this fire ;
And now 'tis far too huge to be blown out
With that same weak wind which enkindled it.
You taught me how to know the face of right,
Acquainted me with interest to this land.
Yea, thrust this enterprise into my heart ;
And come you now to tell me John hath made
His peace with Rome ? What is that peace to me ?
I by the honour of my marriage-bed,
After young Arthur, claim this land for mine ;
And now it is half-conquer'd, must I back,
Because that John has made his peace with Rome ?
Am I Rome's slave ?"

Then, knowing how King John is detested throughout England and is therefore unsupported by many of his subjects, the ambitious and now disappointed French prince exclaims :

" Have I not heard these islanders shout out
Vive le Roy !
Have I not here the best cards for the game
To win this easy match play'd for a crown ?
And shall I now give o'er the yielded set ?
No, no ! on my soul it never shall be said."

Pandulf hears the angry youth with the same calm, steady resolution he evinces with everybody—with the obstinate, unruly John, the eager, passionate Constance, and the politic, astute Philip. The Church, her interests, authority, and dignity alone rule his mind, and, firmly adhering to what he believes his sacred duty, he never yields to any one, nor deviates from the most invincible consistency. While Louis warmly, almost boyishly, opposes him—

declaring that his invasion of England was at first encouraged by the Pope, that it is in a fair way of success, and that after Prince Arthur he is heir to the English Crown, through his marriage with the Princess Blanche, ignoring, however, the claims of John's son, Prince Henry—Pandulf listens without the least emotion, and calmly replies :

“ You look but on the outside of this work.”

This brief remark well expresses the spirit of the zealous Churchman of the period. What signified French or English triumphs, or any earthly success and disappointment, to him, when compared to the Church's interests! Those interests being now secured by John's submission to Pope Innocent, the Dauphin Louis immediately sinks, in Pandulf's estimation, from a useful champion into a petulant obstacle.¹

Yet the future French King is not to be rebuked very severely, for he is heir to the eldest son of the Church, and hitherto has acted in conformity with her wishes. In the midst of Louis's vexation, Sir

¹ “ It must be acknowledged that the influence of the prelates and the clergy was often of great service to the public. It served to unite together a body of men who had great sway over the people, and who kept the community from falling to pieces by the factious and independent power of the nobles ; and, what was of great importance, it threw a mighty authority into the hands of men who, by their profession, were averse to arms and violence, who tempered by their mediation the general disposition towards military enterprises, and who still maintained, even amidst the shock of arms, those secret links without which it is impossible for human society to subsist.”—Hume's “ History,” chap. xii.

Richard enters, coming from King John, and asks if peace is yet made. His warlike mind is delighted at finding it is not, and Pandulf, thus placed between these fiery spirits, for the present is unable to obtain a hearing. A battle seems now inevitable between armed forces, headed by such impetuous leaders, when news comes of John's sudden illness, for he is reported to be poisoned by a monk.

Many of the English under Richard Plantagenet were at this time drowned by unexpected floods. Hubert de Burgh and Richard exchange their disastrous news of John's illness and the loss of the flower of the English army in the Lincolnshire "washes," and apprehend the certain triumph of the French in consequence. Hubert and Richard, in their manly devotion to England—their bravery and straightforwardness—have much in common; but, under such an odious sovereign as John, neither their characters nor abilities can much benefit their distracted country. Their loyal devotion to the unworthy King, whose evil qualities they never discuss or even mention, is a remarkable proof of the strength of loyal principles at this historical period. Such a character as John—nervous, obstinate, and ungrateful—both these men would have despised in a comrade, opposed in a relation, and distrusted in a follower; yet being their sovereign he is only met by respectful remonstrance.¹

¹ "The character of King John is nothing but a complication of vices equally mean and odious, and alike ruinous to himself and destructive to his people. Cowardice, inactivity, folly, levity,

The next scene ends the play. Prince Henry, eldest son of the King and the future Henry III., with Lord Salisbury and Bigot, Earl of Norfolk, are in the orchard of Swinstead Abbey. The prince, anticipating his father's death, though whether by poison or not appears doubtful, exclaims in real compassion :

“ It is too late, the life of all his blood
Is touch'd corruptibly : and his pure brain
(Which some suppose the soul's frail dwelling-house)
Doth by the idle comments that it makes
Foretell the ending of mortality.”

Hearing that the invalid monarch wishes for the open air, he orders him to be brought into the orchard, and, asking after him, hears from Lord Pembroke :

“ He is more patient
Than when you left him ; even now he sung.”

The prince, surprised at hearing this, yet even at his early age showing the devout, compassionate spirit which distinguished his long reign, exclaims :

“ O vanity of sickness ! fierce extremes
In their continuance will not feel themselves.
Death having prey'd upon the outward parts
Leaves them insensible ; and his siege is now
Against the mind, the which he pricks and wounds
With many legions of strange fantasies,

licentiousness, ingratitude, treachery, tyranny, and cruelty—all these qualities appear too evidently in the several incidents of his life to give us room to suspect that the disagreeable picture has been any wise overcharged by the prejudices of the ancient historians.”
—Hume's “ History,” vol. i.

Which in their throng and press to that last hold
 Confound themselves. 'Tis strange that death should sing !
 I am the cygnet to this pale, faint swan,¹
 Who chants a doleful hymn to his own death,
 And from the organ-pipe of frailty sings
 His soul and body to their lasting rest."

Lord Salisbury, who like all acquainted with the Court, well knows the difference between the wicked, unfortunate King who has nearly ruined England and his virtuous, promising successor, exclaims, doubtless expressing the thoughts and hopes of the English nation generally at this time :

"Be of good comfort, Prince, for you are born
 To set a form upon that indigest,
 Which he hath left so shapeless and so rude."

King John is then brought in a chair into the orchard. He declares to his son he believes himself poisoned, longing for cold winds and waters to cool his burning frame. Prince Henry, who already evinces the amiable character he afterwards displayed as King, shows an affection for his wretched father which that sovereign never felt towards his own father, nor perhaps for any one, and asks :

¹ "Powers of song have been often attributed to it, and as often denied. It is, however, perfectly true that this bird has a soft, low voice, rather plaintive, and with little variety."—Yarrell's "British Birds," vol. iii.

"The mute swan has obtained the character, though contradicted by its name, of being a bird of song. It has especially had assigned to it the office of singing before it dies—a dirge at its own departure—the echoes of which die away over the form that has then ceased to utter it."—Morris's "British Birds," vol. v.

“ PRINCE HENRY. How fares your majesty?

KING JOHN. Poisoned—ill-fare ;—dead, forsook, cast off :
And none of you will bid the winter come,
To thrust his icy fingers in my maw ;
Nor let my kingdom’s rivers take their course
Through my burn’d bosom ; nor entreat the north
To make his bleak winds kiss my parched lips,
And comfort me with cold :—I do not ask you much,
I beg cold comfort ; and you are so strait,
And so ungrateful, you deny me that.

PRINCE HENRY. O, that there were some virtue in my tears,
That might relieve you.

KING JOHN. The salt in them is hot.
Within me is a hell ; and there the poison
Is, as a fiend, confin’d to tyrannise
On unreprieveable condemned blood.”

It is only in this last scene that the future King is introduced, but his few words denote almost as amiable a disposition as the sketch of Prince Arthur.¹ Yet the unfortunate John apparently derives no comfort from him, nor does he show any paternal affection or interest in the Prince. His conscience and illness now alike beset him, and, while bitterly complaining that none around afford him any relief, the impetuous Richard rushes to his presence, hastily announcing the loss of the greater part of his army. In this fiery young man—so like John’s warlike brother—Shakespeare makes the King repose a trust and confidence which he places in no one else. Richard’s frank manner, high spirit, and unflinching courage remind John of his gallant family ; while his illegitimacy prevents all feelings of jealousy. He is, in fact, just

¹ Hume says of Prince Henry :—“ Of all men, Nature seemed to have least fitted him for being a tyrant ” (“ History of England,” chap. xii.).

the man who, by character and situation, seems fitted to cheer a prince of John's moody, sensitive, and suspicious nature. But, though a brave soldier, true friend, and loyal subject, Richard has neither prudence nor sound judgment. His rash counsels have prolonged the war with France up to this moment, despite the exertions of Pandulf and the expressed wishes of the invalid King. Yet, in his latest moments, John apparently feels some relief at seeing him, though Richard has only disasters to announce. John foresees his own death from the despairing excitement which the fatal news is sure to cause in his weak state, and he expires while hearing from his brave but reckless nephew of his army's destruction by the Lincolnshire floods.

Richard eagerly exclaims, and though too brave to be personally frightened, yet evidently in great excitement and alarm :

“O, I am scalded with my violent motion,
And spleen of speed to see your majesty.”

King John replies with his last words :

“ KING JOHN. O cousin, thou art come to set mine eye :
The tackle of my heart is crack'd and burnt ;
And all the shrouds, wherewith my life should sail,
Are turn'd to one thread, one little hair :
My heart hath one poor string to stay it by,
Which holds but till thy news be utter'd ;
And then all this thou seest is but a clod,
And module of confounded royalty.

BASTARD. The Dauphin is preparing hitherward :
Where, heaven he knows how we shall answer him :
For, in a night, the best part of my power,

As I upon advantage did remove,
Were in the washes, all unwarily,
Devour'd by the unexpected flood.

[*The KING dies.*”

The bold Richard, grieved yet undismayed by the King's death, which appals Prince Henry, Lord Salisbury, and others, demands more aid against the advancing French, when Salisbury declares he has even later news than Richard has announced, which he never told to the late King. For Cardinal Pandulf, Salisbury says, has just brought terms of honourable peace from the Dauphin, obtained, indeed, through that energetic prelate's influence. Thus with King John's life disappears all present danger to England, which now acknowledges Henry III. as lawful King. The spirited Richard Faulconbridge, equally loyal to both John and Henry in due course of royal succession, addresses the new King, in words evidently expressing English feeling at this time :

“ And happily may your sweet self put on
The lineal state and glory of the land !
To whom with all submission on my knee,
I do bequeath my faithful services,
And true subjection everlastingly.”

Salisbury says to the same effect, speaking for himself and Norfolk :

“ And the like tender of our love we make,
To rest without a spot for evermore.”

And the young King replies, with true and natural amiability :

“ I have a kind soul that would give you thanks,
And knows not how to do it but with tears.”

Richard rejoins in noble words, expressing indeed "the very spirit of Plantagenet," and well worthy of that gallant race :

" O let us pay the time but needful woe,
Since it hath been beforehand with our griefs."

He thus intimates that England has little cause to mourn the death of King John, and proceeds, with bright hopes for its future :

" This England never did, nor never shall,
Lie at the proud foot of a conqueror,
But when it first did help to wound itself."

Anticipating truly that the new monarch will resemble some of his noble ancestry rather than his degenerate, unfortunate father, he concludes in heroic words :

" Now these princes are come home again,
Come the three corners of the world in arms
And we shall shock them. Naught shall make us rue,
If England to itself do rest but true."

The young monarch, in a few touching words, expresses his grateful love and confidence in Richard, Salisbury, and the other ministers around him. Thus ends this tragedy, which, though chiefly founded on an older play of the same name, and departing from facts in some particulars, yet represents John, Elinor, Philip, Prince Henry, Cardinal Pandulf, and Hubert de Burgh in accordance with history ; while the characters of Constance, Arthur, and Richard seem more derived from the poet's fancy than from historical record. The few words which Shakespeare ascribes to Prince

Henry manifest that pleasing promise which his amiable disposition and long reign of fifty-six years fully justified. Henry III. was indeed different from his wicked father in every respect ; and the last page of this noble yet gloomy play is brightened by the devout spirit this prince shows while very young, and which history states that he really possessed.¹

¹ “ He would not be content with less than three masses a day, and held fast to the priest’s hand during the service. With this English and devotional sentiment the King (Henry III.) combined a passionate addiction to art in all its forms, which carried him far beyond the limits of his own country.”—Stanley’s “ Westminster Abbey,” chap. iii.

IV

“KING RICHARD II.” (A.D. 1377)

A BOUT a hundred and sixty years elapsed between King John's death and Richard II.'s accession, and during that time four Kings had reigned in England. It seems uncertain if Shakespeare wrote about any of these four, for, though the play of “Edward III.” is attributed to him by some, it is not always reckoned among his works. But “Richard II.” is undoubtedly his own composition, comprising, however, only the last two years of this luckless sovereign's reign, and seems chiefly founded on Holinshed's “Chronicles.”¹ It is observed by an able French statesman that Shakespeare's later historical plays adhere more and more strictly to history as they approach nearer the poet's own time;² and even “Richard II.” seems, on the whole, more founded on fact, and less on vague tradition, than “King John.” The first scene introduces at once the two chief characters in the drama —the weak, excitable, imprudent King, occasionally displaying high spirit, but usually indolent, nervous,

¹ Staunton's Preface to “Richard II.”

² Guizot's “Criticism on Shakespeare's Historical Plays.”

and often fanciful ; while the brave, shrewd, resolute Bolingbroke appears in many respects a fine specimen of the English character—daring, fearless, and enterprising when young ; cautious, wise, and reflecting when in middle age.¹ They are now both young men, in the full vigour of early manhood. But Richard has already begun to waste time and money among mean, worthless favourites, apparently disregarding the many perils which encompass his throne.² He, indeed, occupied a dangerous position—not so much from its own importance as from the numerous ambitious kinsmen, old and young, who surrounded him.³ His uncles, John of Gaunt and the Duke of York, are both vexed at his reckless conduct, and probably suspect his having had some share in the mysterious death of their brother, the Duke of Gloster.⁴ Richard’s strange position amid so many

¹ “The new Duke of Lancaster had acquired, by his conduct and abilities, the esteem of the public ; he had joined to his other praises those of piety and valour. The people, who found nothing in the King’s person which they could love or revere, and were even disgusted with many parts of his conduct, easily transferred to Henry that attachment which the death of the Duke of Gloster had left without any fixed direction.”—Hume’s “History,” vol. ii.

² “Indolent, profuse, addicted to low pleasures, he spent his whole time in feasting and jollity, and dissipated, in idle show or in bounties to favourites of no reputation, that revenue which the people expected to see him employ in enterprises directed to public honour and advantage. He forgot his rank by admitting all men to his familiarity.”—Hume’s “History,” vol. ii.

³ “Richard II. was a peaceful monarch, thwarted at every turn by ambitious kinsmen.”—Stubbs’s “Constitutional History,” vol. ii.

⁴ Hume inclines to believe, though not positive on the subject, that Richard had been privy to Gloster’s murder, yet Gloster was, however, generally suspected of treasonable designs against the young King (vol. ii.).

hostile kinsmen was probably caused by Gloster's death, and partly explains why this Prince, distrusting most of his relatives, placed his confidence in favourites of comparatively low rank—Sir John Bushy, Sir Henry Green, &c.—who, like most of their class, having “no friends,” were all the more obedient to their royal patron.

In the first scene, Richard, after vainly trying to make peace between Bolingbroke and Norfolk, appoints a day for their mortal combat in his presence, at Coventry.¹ Between John of Gaunt and his brave son there is evidently a strong affection, and probably a thorough confidence. Norfolk, while trying to repel Bolingbroke's charges, appeals to Gaunt as

“The honourable father of my foe”;

but that powerful nobleman, called “time-honoured Lancaster,” never answers, but, in obedience to King Richard, he also vainly tries to make peace between his son and Norfolk. It is evident, from the next scene between the widowed Duchess of Gloster and Gaunt, her brother-in-law, what deep indignation Gloster's supposed murder has caused among the royal family.

“DUCHESS. But Thomas, my dear lord, my life, my Gloster—
 One phial full of Edward's sacred blood,
 One flourishing branch of Edward's royal root,
 Is crack'd, and all the precious liquor spilt;
 Is hack'd down, and his summer leaves all faded,
 By envy's hand, and murder's bloody axe.
 Ah, Gaunt! his blood was thine.”

¹ Sir James Stephen says that “trial by combat was introduced by William the Conqueror;” adding, that it was “only private war under regulations” (“English Criminal Law,” chap. iii.).

The Duchess vaguely urges Gaunt to avenge Gloster's death, without positively accusing the King ; but it is clear that she and all her husband's kinsfolk dislike and distrust him, viewing Bolingbroke as their champion. Gaunt tries to soothe his sister-in-law, telling her to seek religious consolation, and intimating that even if Richard had instigated Gloster's murder, he would never rebel against him.

“ DUCHESS. In suffering thus thy brother to be slaughter'd,
Thou show'st the naked pathway to thy life,
Teaching stern murder how to butcher thee.
What shall I say ? to safeguard thine own life,
The best way is to 'venge my Gloster's death.

GAUNT. God's is the quarrel ; for God's substitute,
His deputy anointed in His sight,
Hath caus'd his death : the which if wrongfully,
Let Heaven revenge ; for I may never lift
An angry arm against His minister.

DUCHESS. Where, then, alas ! may I complain myself ?

GAUNT. To God, the widow's champion and defence.

DUCHESS. Why, then, I will.”

But he dearly loves his spirited son, Bolingbroke, whose talents and popularity are gradually making him more formidable to Richard and his adherents. In loyalty to the King, the brothers Gaunt and York, though men of such different characters, resemble each other. They refuse to aid any revolt, yet both blame Richard's conduct, and detest his favourites ; while their respective sons, the gallant Bolingbroke and the mean, treacherous Aumerle, contemplate a future rebellion. The Duchess of Gloster, while hating Norfolk, and wishing success to Bolingbroke in the coming fight, speaks kindly of her other

brother-in-law, York, who, throughout this play, as in history, seems a strange, flighty, peculiar man, placed in a highly-important position. His son, Aumerle, the Duchess does not name, though he was suspected of having had some share in Gloster's death, and was very differently disposed from his father. The widowed Duchess, in deep dejection, parts from Gaunt, after a touching interview, and never appears again.

The next scene is at Coventry, where the combatants appear, armed and eager for their encounter, before the King and Court. John of Gaunt wishes all good fortune to his son in the coming duel; while Richard speaks kindly to both parties, apparently sympathising most with Norfolk, though his subsequent conduct towards him does not bear out his words. He says to Bolingbroke :

‘ Cousin of Hereford, as thy cause is right,
So be thy fortune in this royal fight ! ’

And to Norfolk :

“ Farewell, my lord : securely I espy
Virtue with valour couchèd in thine eye.”

Yet he immediately afterwards forbids the combat, banishing Norfolk for life and Bolingbroke for six years. Both combatants warmly complain of this sentence, which Richard seems to pronounce without the advice of any one, unless, indeed, it was secretly suggested by some of his many favourites. Norfolk, in leaving England, utters prophetic words about

Bolingbroke, which no one notices at this time, but were probably remembered by all who heard them. Bolingbroke haughtily asks him to confess the truth of the charges against him before he leaves the King for ever, and Norfolk boldly replies :

“ No, Bolingbroke ; if ever I were traitor,
My name be blotted from the Book of Life,
And I from heaven banished, as from thence !
But what thou art, God, thou, and I do know ;
And all too soon, I fear, the King shall rue.
Farewell, my liege.”

Richard at this moment seems in a most singular position. He banishes for life one whom he believes loyal, and, as if wishing to appease hostile kinsmen, shortens Bolingbroke's banishment from ten to six years, for the sake of Gaunt, who, with cold thanks, however, observes that this change will make no difference to him, as his old age will never permit him to see his son again. It seems historically true that Bolingbroke's banishment greatly offended the King's relatives, among whom, indeed, the latter does not seem to have had any real friend. Richard is irritated at finding Gaunt so grieved at his son's comparatively short banishment, and, his suspicions of both being apparently excited or increased, he insists on the sentence being enforced, leaving the father and son together with their nephew and cousin, Aumerle, and their friend, the Lord Marshal. Bolingbroke warmly expresses his grief at being banished ; his father vainly tries to console him, while the others show strong sympathy, for young Bolingbroke is already very popular at Court and in England.

“GAUNT. All places that the eye of heaven visits,
Are to a wise man ports and happy havens.
Teach thy necessity to reason thus ;
There is no virtue like necessity.
Think not the King did banish thee,
But thou the King.

Look, what thy soul holds dear, imagine it
To lie that way thou go’st, not whence thou com’st :
Suppose the singing birds musicians ;
The grass whereon thou tread’st the presence strew’d ;
The flowers, fair ladies, and thy steps no more
Than a delightful measure or a dance.
For gnarling sorrow hath less power to bite
The man that mocks at it, and sets it light.”

To these rather imaginative or fanciful consolations, Bolingbroke, always a most practical prince, naturally replies in words which his father cannot deny :

“BOLINGBROKE. O, who can hold a fire in his hand,
By thinking on the frosty Caucasus ?
Or cloy the hungry edge of appetite,
By bare imagination of a feast ?
Or wallow naked in December snow,
By thinking on fantastic Summer’s heat ?
O, no ! the apprehension of the good
Gives but the greater feeling to the worse.

GAUNT. Come, come, my son, I’ll bring thee on thy way ;
Had I thy youth and cause, I would not stay.

BOLINGBROKE. Then, England’s ground, farewell ; sweet soil,
adieu ;
My mother, and my nurse, that bears me yet !
Where’er I wander, boast of this I can,
Though banish’d, yet a true-born Englishman.”¹

¹ “As Henry Bolingbroke left London, the streets were crowded with people weeping for his fate ; some followed him even to the coast. His withdrawal removed the last check on Richard’s despotism. He forced on every tenant of the Crown an oath to recognise the acts of his committee as valid, and to oppose any attempts to alter or revoke them.”—Green’s “History of the English People,” book iv.

The next scene is the first that mentions the deceit of Aumerle, who, after condoling with Bolingbroke while in his presence and in that of his father, Gaunt, now assures Richard that he has no affection for him. The King openly expresses distrust of his banished cousin, even owning to Aumerle that both he and his three followers—Bushy, Green, and Bagot—have

“Observed his courtship to the common people,”

and already suspect his having designs upon the throne. The three favourites thoroughly share Richard's views, who announces his intention of going to Ireland, when he is summoned to the death-bed of his uncle, Gaunt. Richard, with heartless levity, scarcely consistent with his not unamiable character, avowedly wishes Gaunt dead, that he may seize his money and spend it on the Irish war. It is evident that Richard, who, in the beginning of his reign, had shown both energy and good feeling, became more and more frivolous, reckless, and unjust, perhaps owing partly to the influence of Bushy, Green, and others, whom he trusted and consulted more than any other advisers.¹ These obsequious courtiers, with Aumerle, accompany the King to John of Gaunt's house. Previous to their arrival, the dying Duke of Lancaster has a remarkable conference with his brother, York.

¹ “Richard II. was a man of considerable talents; but his ordinary conduct belied the abilities which on rare occasions shone forth. Extreme pride and violence, with an inordinate partiality for the most worthless favourites, were his predominant characteristics.”—Hallam's “Middle Ages,” chap. viii.

These two princes, though firm allies, are great contrasts in character. Gaunt is brave, resolute, patriotic, with a high sense of duty to the sovereign whom he cannot help despising, and a strong affection for his banished son, whose secret ambition he does not apparently encourage. York is weak, excitable, and hesitating; he has no confidence in Richard, and abhors the favourites; yet has no idea of raising a rebellion against him.¹ The dying Gaunt, in a noble speech to his sympathising brother, deplores the present misgovernment of England, and foresees additional disasters from the reckless conduct of the young King. He pathetically exclaims :

“ This royal throne of kings, this sceptr’d isle,
 This fortress, built by Nature for herself,
 Against infection and the hand of war ;
 This happy breed of men, this little world ;
 This precious stone set in the silver sea,
 Which serves it in the office of a wall ;
 This blessed plot, this earth, this realm, this England,
 Dear for her reputation through the world,
 Is now leas’d out (I die pronouncing it)
 Like to a tenement, or pelting ² farm :
 England, bound in with the triumphant sea,
 Whose rocky shore beats back the envious siege
 Of watery Neptune, is now bound in with shame,
 With inky blots, and rotten parchment bonds ;

¹ “ In a single year, the whole colour of Richard’s government had changed. He had revenged himself on the men who had once held him down, and his revenge was hardly taken before he disclosed a plan of absolute government. . . . Forced loans, the outlawry of seven counties at once, on the plea that they had supported his enemies, and must purchase pardon—a reckless interference with the course of justice—roused into new life the existing discontents.”—Green’s “ History of the English People,” vol. i.

² Paltry.

That England, that was wont to conquer others,
Hath made a shameful conquest of itself :
O, would that scandal vanish with my life,
How happy then were my ensuing death !”

Hume is surprised that Shakespeare did not make Gaunt mention English civil laws and liberty in this grand speech.¹ But Shakespeare probably thought that, although English princes might bravely defend and sincerely love their country, yet in those times the privileges or liberty of subjects from royal control were to them rather causes for jealous apprehension than pride or satisfaction. Hume admits that in “Shakespeare’s historical plays, the manners, characters, and even the transactions of the several reigns are exactly copied.” This is valuable praise from the learned historian, who yet surely underrates Shakespeare’s genius in writing for the stage.²

He finishes speaking as Richard enters with the Queen, Aumerle, and the three favourites. Gaunt, indignant at the King’s conduct, and knowing he has only a short time to live, no longer speaks respectfully, but earnestly reproaches him, declaring he is surrounded by flatterers, and that he is ruining both his kingdom and his relatives. This grand scene never occurred,³ yet it apparently displays the real feelings of the royal family, represented by Gaunt, about the King’s conduct and policy. Richard, instead of being softened by his dying uncle’s warning, is roused to fury, and declares that were he not a near

¹ “History of England,” vol. i., Appendix iii.

² Appendix to “Reign of James I.”

³ See Mr. Furnivall’s Preface to “Richard II.”

relative, he would have had him beheaded before he had spoken so far. This violent language rouses the high-spirited Gaunt to reproach Richard with his suspected share in his late uncle Gloster's murder, with which no one had yet openly charged him.

“KING RICHARD. Now by my seat's right royal majesty,
Wert thou not brother to great Edward's son,
This tongue, that runs so roundly in thy head,
Should run thy head from thy unreverend shoulders.

GAUNT. O, spare me not, my brother Edward's son,
For that I was his father Edward's son.

My brother Gloster, plain, well-meaning soul,
May be a precedent and witness good,
That thou respect'st not spilling Edward's blood :
Join with the present sickness that I have :
And thy unkindness be like crooked age,
To crop at once a too-long wither'd flower.
Live in thy shame, but die not shame with thee !
These words hereafter thy tormentors be !”

On this occasion, the Duke of York strongly displays the utter want of judgment which marks his flighty, strange character throughout. He must know that the banished Henry Bolingbroke (Lord Hereford) cannot be friendly to Richard, even if he does not openly rival him ; while Gaunt, though indignant with the King, has never been suspected of disloyalty by Richard's most faithful adherents. Yet, in an awkward attempt to soothe the King, York foolishly declares that Gaunt is as loyal to Richard as his ambitious son is. To this unlucky exclamation Richard makes a sarcastic reply—one of the few occasions that his passionate, giddy temper resorts to irony of any sort—and evidently the talkative, frivolous York feels confounded, for he attempts no rejoinder.

“YORK. I do beseech your majesty, impute his words
To wayward sickliness and age in him :
He loves you, on my life, and holds you dear
As Harry, Duke of Hereford, were he here.

KING RICHARD. Right ; you say true : as Hereford’s love, so
his ;
As theirs, so mine : and all be as it is.”

The Duke of Lancaster is then borne out of the room, and dies ; his brother York and Northumberland announcing the news to Richard, who immediately declares that he will confiscate Gaunt’s property. York indignantly remonstrates against this wild injustice, reminding his royal nephew of the cruel injury this act would inflict on Bolingbroke, now Duke of Lancaster. Richard hears his uncle with utter contempt, yet feels sure of his loyalty, for he intends leaving him to govern England during his own approaching absence in Ireland. Whether Richard was induced by the cunning Aumerle to so trust his father, or why he had so much more confidence in York’s loyalty than in his judgment, does not appear ; but the thoughtless King goes to Ireland, while several English nobles, with the crafty Earl of Northumberland, express deep indignation at Richard’s conduct, and their warmest sympathy for the illegally disinherited Duke of Lancaster. Northumberland, seeing his companions sufficiently angry with the King, informs them that Bolingbroke is already on his way home from France, attended by several English gentlemen, who are as disgusted as they are with Richard’s government.¹

¹ “Richard seized the Lancastrian estates. Archbishop Arundel hastened to Paris, and pressed the Duke of Lancaster to return to England, telling him how all men there looked for it, especially the

This prelate is only once mentioned, and not introduced in this play.

Evidently, an insurrection is now approaching, and so the young Queen fears in the next scene, where she owns to Bushy and Bagot her uneasiness about the King's affairs. Her apprehensions are then confirmed by Green's entrance, announcing that the revolution has actually broken out, headed by Bolingbroke, and supported by the Northumberland family. The Queen, who was very much attached to Richard, entreats York, who enters soon after Green, to comfort her. But this the Duke cannot do ; he himself is now old, and his nervous mind is agitated by conflicting emotions. He pities the King and Queen ; knows he is left in a responsible position by Richard, whom he represents, and to whom, according to the strict monarchical ideas of the time, he is conscientiously loyal ; yet every other feeling, wish, and sentiment urge him to side with the advancing Lancaster.¹ He is therefore quite perplexed, and, though he tried to rally the royal forces, was unable to do so. While pitying the Queen, he evidently sympathises more with his wronged nephew, Lancaster, than his own loyal instincts approve.

Londoners, who loved him a hundred times more than they loved the King. For a while, Henry Bolingbroke remained buried in thought, 'leaning on a window overlooking a garden,' but Arundel's pressure at last prevailed."—Green's "History of the English People."

¹ "The Duke of York was left guardian of the realm—a place to which his birth entitled him, but which both his slender abilities and his natural connections with the Duke of Lancaster rendered him utterly incapable of filling in such a dangerous emergency."—Hume's "History," vol. ii.

“YORK. If I know how, or which way, to order these affairs,
Thus disorderly thrust into my hands,
Never believe me. Both are my kinsmen ;—
The one is my sovereign, whom both my oath
And duty bids defend ; the other again
Is my kinsman, whom the King hath wrong’d,
Whom conscience and my kindred bids to right.

“All is uneven,
And everything is left at six and seven.”

After the Queen and he leave the room, the three favourites—Bushy, Bagot, and Green—have an anxious conference together. These unlucky men foresee the end of their power, and, in their position, they know that loss of life is its probable accompaniment. They apparently have no military talent or influence ; are hated both by nobles and people, their only friend being the absent King, whose dangers are rapidly increasing. Bagot goes to Ireland to rejoin the King, while the others remain in England ; but they evidently believe themselves doomed, as they never mention escape to the Continent, which alone might have saved their lives.

“BUSHY.
Proportionable to the enemy,
Is impossible.

For us to levy power,

“GREEN. Besides, our nearness to the King in love,
Is near the hate of those love not the King.

“BUSHY.
Will the hateful commons perform for us :
Except, like curs, to tear us all to pieces.

For little office

“BAGOT. Farewell, if heart’s presages be not vain,
We three here part, that ne’er shall meet again.

“BUSHY. That’s as York thrives to beat back Bolingbroke.

“GREEN. Alas, poor Duke ! the task he undertakes

Is numb'ring sands, and drinking oceans dry :
Where one on his side fights, thousands will fly.

BUSHY. Farewell at once ; for once, for all, and ever.

GREEN. Well, we may meet again.

BAGOT. I fear me, never."

The next scene changes to Gloucestershire, where Bolingbroke, joined by Northumberland, is at the head of an increasing force, advancing steadily on London. These two leaders are just the men likely to conduct a successful insurrection, being alike brave, cautious, and determined. Northumberland is much older—perhaps more of a statesman than a warrior ; while Bolingbroke, even when a young man, was distinguished in both capacities. In the present enterprise, however, their great qualities are little needed, for nearly all England declares for them, and revolts from Richard at first as unanimously as, nearly three centuries later, the whole country abandoned James II. in favour of the invading Prince of Orange, without a single battle.¹ In this scene, Northumberland's brave son, Harry Percy—surnamed Hotspur—makes his first appearance, now quite a youth. He at first does not recognise Bolingbroke, and waits for his father to introduce him, who presents him to his future sovereign.

"NORTHUMBERLAND. Have you forgot the Duke of Hereford, boy ?

PERCY. No, my good lord ; for that is not forgot

¹ "Richard's government for nearly two years [the period comprised in this play] was altogether tyrannical, and, upon the same principles that cost James II. his throne, it was unquestionably far more necessary, unless our fathers would have abandoned all thoughts of liberty, to expel Richard II."—Hallam's "Middle Ages," chap. viii.

Which ne'er I did remember ; to my knowledge,
I never in my life did look on him.

NORTHUMBERLAND. Then learn to know him now ; this is the Duke.

PERCY. My gracious lord, I tender you my service,
Such as it is, being tender, raw, and young ;
Which elder days shall ripen, and confirm
To more approved service and desert.

BOLINGBROKE. I thank thee, gentle Percy ; and be sure,
I count myself in nothing else so happy
As in a soul rememb'ring my good friends ;
And, as my fortune ripens with thy love,
It shall be still thy true love's recompense :
My heart this covenant makes, my hand thus seals it.”

This first meeting between the calm Bolingbroke and the dashing, fiery youth, Harry Percy, was probably long remembered, when, in after years, they were destined to become mortal foes. At this time Bolingbroke —now styled Duke of Lancaster—is already far more shrewd and cautious than when fiercely challenging Norfolk, about two years before, with an impetuous courage like that of young Percy himself. The bold daring of his youth is being now gradually succeeded by the firm energy of early manhood ; while Harry Percy resembles what he was in dauntless courage, but has none of that steady sense and coolness which Bolingbroke always possessed. Between these two brave spirits the crafty Northumberland acts as introducer, presenting his fiery son to the ambitious Prince, whom he now considers King, and supports with all his power, yet who was fated, in a few years, to destroy both him and his family. Bolingbroke is evidently pleased at the ready, frank loyalty of the bold youth before him, who, sharing his father's views, or obeying his wishes, is yet rather a contrast to him,

being as eager and impetuous as Northumberland is cautious and designing. At this time of their lives, Bolingbroke seems to unite in himself much of Northumberland's calm prudence with Hotspur's daring bravery; and this distinguished trio are now in complete alliance. They are soon joined by more nobles, with their adherents, and at last the Duke of York, nominal governor of England, meets the successful and unopposed insurgents. He at first, with the loyal spirit of the times, sharply reproaches his ambitious nephew for even returning to England while under legal sentence of banishment. To this reproach Bolingbroke makes a dignified, touching reply, which is specially calculated to impress his uncle, who hears it with assumed indifference.

“ BOLINGBROKE. As I was banish'd, I was banish'd Hereford :
But as I come, I come for Lancaster,
And, noble uncle, I beseech your grace,
Look on my wrongs with an indifferent eye :
You are my father, for methinks in you
I see old Gaunt alive ; O, then, my father !
Will you permit that I shall stand condemn'd
A wand'ring vagabond ; my rights and royalties
Pluck'd from my arms perforce, and given away
To upstart unthrifts ? Wherefore was I born ?
If that my cousin King be King of England,
It must be granted I am Duke of Lancaster.
You have a son, Aumerle, my noble kinsman ;
Had you first died, and he been thus trod down,
He should have found his uncle Gaunt a father,
To rouse his wrongs, and chase them to the bay.
My father's goods are all distrain'd, and sold ;
And these, and all, are all amiss employ'd.
What would you have me do ? I am a subject,
And I challenge law : attorneys are denied me ;
And therefore personally I lay claim
To my inheritance of free descent.”

York sees, however, that resistance on his part is hopeless, and coldly invites his formidable nephew to Berkeley Castle—perhaps not sorry that he has no alternative. Bolingbroke, who, all his life, showed great knowledge of human nature, then succeeds in rousing York’s anger against the King, by skilfully alluding to the detested trio, “the upstart unthrifts”—Bushy, Bagot, and Green—whom he terms

“The caterpillars of the commonwealth,”

whom he has

“Sworn to weed and pluck away.”

Immediately York’s excitable temper is aroused, and he declares he will join Bolingbroke; then partly recalls his words.

“YORK. It may be I will go with you:—but yet I’ll pause;
For I am loath to break our country’s laws.
Nor friends, nor foes, to me welcome you are:
Things past redress are now with me past care.”

This almost childish hesitation between his feelings and his duty doubtless amused and gratified the crafty Northumberland and many of Bolingbroke’s followers. For though York was a prince of little ability, he was yet the nominal ruler in Richard’s absence, eldest member of the royal family, and the only surviving brother of the late King. His alliance, or even neutrality, was therefore very valuable, and Bolingbroke’s success from this time was rapid and complete. Still, some noblemen—Lord Salisbury, Lord Wiltshire,

Sir Stephen Scroop, the Bishop of Carlisle, &c.—adhered to Richard, but could not delay the triumphant advance of Bolingbroke, who soon captured and executed two of the unhappy favourites—Bushy and Green—apparently without any trial. He sentences them in presence of York, who never intercedes for them; while Northumberland and his son, Percy, are also beside him, and see his orders executed.

“ BOLINGBROKE. Bushy and Green, I will not vex your souls
 (Since presently your souls must part your bodies)
 With too much urging your pernicious lives,
 For 'twere no charity: yet, to wash your blood
 From off my hands, here, in the view of men,
 I will unfold some causes of your deaths.
 You have misled a prince, a royal king,
 A happy gentleman in blood and lineaments,
 By you unhappied and disfigur'd clean.¹
 Myself—a prince, by fortune of my birth;
 Near to the King in blood; and near in love,
 Till you did make him misinterpret me,—
 Have stoop'd my neck under your injuries,
 And sigh'd my English breath in foreign clouds,
 Eating the bitter bread of banishment;
 While you have fed upon my seignories,
 Dispark'd my parks, and fell'd my forest woods;
 From mine own windows torn my household coat,
 Raz'd out my impress, leaving me no sign—
 Save men's opinions, and my living blood—
 To show the world I a gentleman.
 This, and much more, much more than twice all this,
 Condemns you to the death.
 My Lord Northumberland, see them despatch'd.”

To which request that zealous, unscrupulous nobleman makes no objection, though most of their offences were committed by the will of Richard II. Bolingbroke then sends a cautious message to the captured

¹ Completely.

Queen, who is at the Duke of York's house, assuring her of respectful treatment, and prepares to encounter the Welsh chief, Owen Glendower, who had shown some signs of resistance in behalf of the King.

The next scene describes Richard's return to England, attended by his faithful adherent, the Bishop of Carlisle, and by his cousin, the deceitful Aumerle. Richard, in this important scene, reveals more of his peculiar character than has yet appeared. He is at first delighted at returning to England, and confident that directly his arrival is known, all rebellion will cease. He speaks, therefore, in high-flown, exaggerated language, but his excitable spirit is soon depressed by Salisbury's arrival, telling him that a large part of his army has already joined Bolingbroke.¹ Sir Stephen Scroop follows, with yet more disastrous news of Bolingbroke's complete success throughout England. Richard, amazed, asks about Lord Wiltshire, Bushy, Green, &c., and now losing confidence in every one, suspects they have also “made peace” with his enemy. Scroop gravely replies that they have, indeed, “made their peace” with him, which Richard mistakes for their treachery. He utters furious reproaches against his late favourites, for whom he had always, perhaps, more liking than esteem ; but

¹ “Richard alternates between abject despondency and an airy, unreal confidence. There is in Richard, as Coleridge has finely observed, ‘a constant overflow of emotions, from a total incapability of controlling them, and thence a waste of that energy which should have been reserved for actions, in the passion and effort of mere resolves and menaces.’”—Dowden's “Shakespeare's Mind and Art.”

his rage turns to despair at hearing of their being executed by Bolingbroke's order. Bagot, however, was not executed, and Scroop does not name him. Richard's despair is now complete ; he sees nothing but treason, desertion, and ruin before him.

“ KING RICHARD. Of comfort no man speak :
 Let's talk of graves, of worms, and epitaphs ;
 Make dust our paper, and with rainy eyes
 Write sorrow on the bosom of the earth.
 Let's choose executors, and talk of wills :
 And yet not so—for what can we bequeath,
 Save our deposed bodies to the ground ?
 Our lands, our lives, and all, are Bolingbroke's,
 And nothing can we call our own but death.

For God's sake, let us sit upon the ground,
 And tell sad stories of the death of kings :—
 How some have been depos'd, some slain in war,
 Some haunted by the ghosts they have depos'd :
 Some poison'd by their wives, some sleeping kill'd ;
 All murder'd :—for within the hollow crown
 That rounds the mortal temples of a king
 Keeps Death his court ; and there the antic sits,
 Scoffing his state, and grinning at his pomp—
 Allowing him a breath, a little scene,
 To monarchize, be fear'd, and kill with looks ;
 Infusing him with self and vain conceit—
 As if this flesh, which walls about our life,
 Were brass impregnable—and, humour'd thus,
 Comes at the last, and with a little pin
 Bores through his castle wall, and—farewell king !”

The Bishop of Carlisle tries to console and rouse him, and is apparently succeeding, when the final news of the Duke of York's defection arrives. This intelligence probably depresses Richard's advisers as much as himself, for no word of hope or encouragement is uttered after its announcement. The King dismisses

his remaining followers, repairing to Flint Castle, there to await his triumphant foe, whose prisoner he already considers himself, and against whom he abandons all idea of resistance.¹

The next scene brings Bolingbroke, with York, Northumberland, young Hotspur, &c., before the walls of Flint Castle, where Richard, with the Bishop of Carlisle, Aumerle, Lord Salisbury, and Sir Stephen Scroop, are helplessly awaiting their fate. Aumerle, however, is in little danger, owing to his father York's influence, who is treated with the highest respect by Bolingbroke. York's present position as an elderly, whimsical Prince, surrounded by ambitious, fiery young men and crafty old ones, is embarrassing, yet almost ludicrous. He pettishly reproves Northumberland, even at this crisis, for naming Richard without his kingly title, for which omission the ambitious Earl, probably laughing to himself, offers a slight apology. York even comforts his own vexed spirit and uneasy conscience by slightly reprimanding his triumphant nephew, who hears him with politic calmness, but, doubtless, secret impatience.

“YORK. It would become the Lord Northumberland
To say *King* Richard.

NORTHUMBERLAND. Your grace mistakes; only to be brief,
Left I his title out.

YORK. The time hath been,

¹ “The sincere concurrence which most of the prelates and nobility, with the mass of the people, gave to changes, which would not otherwise have been effected by one so unprovided with foreign support as Henry Bolingbroke, proves this revolution (1399) to have been, if not an indispensable, yet a national act.”—Hallam's “Middle Ages,” chap. viii.

Would you have been so brief with him, he would
 Have been so brief with you, to shorten you,
 For taking so the head, your whole head's length.

BOLINGBROKE. Mistake not, uncle, farther than you should.

YORK. Take not, good cousin, farther than you should,
 Lest you mistake : the heavens are o'er our heads.

BOLINGBROKE. I know it, uncle, and oppose not myself
 Against their will."

He now summons the unfortunate King, through Northumberland, to surrender. Richard reproaches the latter, then bewails his misfortunes, and finally surrenders to Bolingbroke.

"KING RICHARD. What must the King do now ? Must he submit ?

The King shall do it. Must he be depos'd ?
 The King shall be contented : Must he lose
 The name of King ? o' God's name let it go :
 I'll give my jewels, for a set of beads ;
 My gorgeous palace, for a hermitage ;
 My gay apparel, for an almsman's gown ;
 My sceptre, for a palmer's walking staff ;
 My subjects, for a pair of carved saints ;
 And my large kingdom, for a little grave,
 A little, little grave, an obscure grave :—
 Or I'll be buried in the King's highway,
 Some way of common trade, where subjects' feet
 May hourly trample on their sovereign's head :
 For on my heart they tread, now whilst I live ;
 And buried once, why not upon my head ?"

Bolingbroke preserves a respectful manner to his royal prisoner, which never comforts Richard, who, without either defying him or showing personal fear, apparently finds a morbid relief in describing and exaggerating his own humiliation. Although his grand language is Shakespeare's invention, the feelings it expresses agree with historical records of both

his disposition and state of mind.¹ Aumerle, however, is represented more steadily faithful to Richard than he really was, and, indeed, Shakespeare's sketch of him is not very clear or satisfactory. He seems trusted by Richard in extremity, and yet he accuses the King's unfortunate favourite, Bagot, when a prisoner in the presence of Bolingbroke.

Previous to this scene, Shakespeare introduces one entirely of his own invention, where the young Queen Isabella is staying at her uncle the Duke of York's country residence. In his garden, she, with her attendant, hears the gardeners talking over public affairs, and professionally comparing her husband's executed favourites to “weeds plucked up by the roots.” They have heard that Bolingbroke has actually captured the King, of which the Queen was not hitherto aware. In angry impatience, she asks the gardeners if their news is true, and, when convinced of it, rather petulantly hopes that their plants may never grow, and then hastens to London, to meet, if possible, her captive husband.

The next scene describes, amid a large assemblage of influential men, the fallen favourite Bagot—now a prisoner before Bolingbroke—accusing Aumerle of a share in the Duke of Gloster's murder, many years before. Bagot's subsequent fate is not mentioned, but he probably escaped that of his luckless friends, Bushy and Green.² Aumerle, however, boldly denies

¹ Hume's “History”; also Hallam's.

² “It appears from a petition of 1400 that one Bagot had been impeached by the Commons of ‘many horrible acts and misprisions.’ He was put to answer before the Lords, and produced ‘a charter of

this charge, and is then challenged by several noblemen, who believe him guilty, to single combat. Even Hotspur, though only a youth, eagerly offers to fight him, already showing that fiery spirit which made him so remarkable even in that fierce age.

“AUMERLE. Princes and noble lords,
What answer shall I make to this base man?

There is my gage, the manual seal of death,
That marks thee out for hell: I say, thou liest,
And will maintain what thou hast said is false,
In thy heart-blood, though being all too base
To stain the temper of my knightly sword.

BOLINGBROKE. Bagot, forbear; thou shalt not take it up.

FITZWATER. If that thy valour stand on sympathies,
There is my gage, Aumerle, in gage to thine:
I heard thee say, and vauntingly thou spak'st it,
That thou wert cause of noble Gloster's death.
If thou deny'st it twenty times, thou liest;
And I will turn thy falsehood to thy heart,
Where it was forged, with my rapier's point.

AUMERLE. Thou dar'st not, coward, live to see the day.

PERCY. Aumerle, thou liest; his honour is as true,
In this appeal, as thou art all unjust:
And, that thou art so, there I'll throw my gage,
To prove it on thee to the extremest point
Of mortal breathing: seize it, if thou dar'st.

AUMERLE. And if I do not, may my hands rot off,
And never brandish more revengeful steel
Over the glittering helmet of my foe!”

Bolingbroke, as brave as any of them, but with more sagacity, well fitted to be their chief, listens to their eager defiances with calm interest, perhaps remembering the time when he, young like them, was general pardon,’ on which the Lords considered ‘that the said Monsieur William ought not to be prevented making a reply through the law.’—Stephen’s “English Criminal Law,” chap. v. Perhaps, therefore, Bagot was more fortunate than Bushy and Green,

equally impetuous in defying the Duke of Norfolk.¹ He resolves, however, on having Aumerle tried, and on recalling his old enemy, Norfolk, from banishment, and restoring him his property, when he regretfully hears of his death from the Bishop of Carlisle, the steady adherent of Richard, and who evidently believes in Norfolk's innocence of the many mysterious charges against him.

Bolingbroke, having postponed Aumerle's trial, now hears from York that Richard consents to name him his heir, and to yield up the crown. With unwonted eagerness he exclaims :

“In God's name, I'll ascend the regal throne,”

when the Bishop of Carlisle interposes, remonstrating with courageous eloquence, though in exaggerated terms, against such a proceeding. Northumberland, furious at this interruption, wants to arrest him for treason, although against an unacknowledged king; but Bolingbroke, with his usual calmness, refuses to sanction this proposal, and orders the captive monarch to be brought before them all. York then conducts the unfortunate Richard to the presence of his successful foe, now surrounded by powerful adherents, and really King of England already, by the submission, if not will of the nation.²

¹ “Bolingbroke utters a few words in ‘Richard II.,’ yet we feel that from the first the chief force centres in him. He is dauntless, but his courage is under the control of his judgment. All his faculties are well organised, and help one another.”—Dowden's “Shakespeare's Mind and Art.”

² “In this revolution of 1399 there was as remarkable an attention shown to the formalities of the constitution—allowance made for

Richard again, as when he landed in England, and when surrendering to Bolingbroke, for the third time, reveals his saddened mind by dwelling on and exaggerating every circumstance of his humiliation. He is apparently broken-hearted, neither defending his past conduct nor accusing his enemies, but making long speeches, addressed more to his own agitated mind than to any one present; yet heard by all, and, of course, with much interest. As if acting a scene on the stage, he asks Bolingbroke to hold the crown upon one side, while he supports it on the other, and while in this strange attitude, resigns it to his victorious cousin.¹

“KING RICHARD. Now is this golden crown like a deep well,
That owes two buckets filling one another;
The emptier ever dancing in the air,
The other down, unseen, and full of water :

the men and the times—as in that of 1688 [the accession of William and Mary in place of James II.]. Upon the cession of the King, as upon his death, the Parliament was no more. Yet Henry Bolingbroke was too well pleased with his friends to part with them so readily, and he had much to effect before the fervour of their spirits should abate. Hence an expedient was devised of issuing writs for a new Parliament, returnable in six days. These neither were, nor could be, complied with, but the same members as had deposed Richard sat in the new Parliament, which was regularly opened by Henry’s commissioners, as if they had been duly elected.”—Hallam’s “Middle Ages,” chap. viii.

¹ “Without any of true kingly strength or dignity, Richard has a fine feeling for the royal situation. Instead of comprehending things as they are, and achieving heroic deeds, he satiates his heart with the grace, the tenderness, or the pathos of situations . . . Richard is, as it were, fading out of existence. Bolingbroke seems not only to have robbed him of his authority, but to have encroached upon his very personality, and to have usurped his understanding and his will.”—Dowden’s “Shakespeare’s Mind and Art.”

That bucket down, and full of tears, am I,
Drinking my griefs, whilst you mount up on high.

BOLINGBROKE. Are you contented to resign the crown?

KING RICHARD. Ay, no ;—no ay ;—for I must nothing be :
Therefore no, no, for I resign to thee.

Now mark me how I will undo myself :—

I give this heavy weight from off my head,
And this unwieldy sceptre from my hand,
The pride of kingly sway from out my heart ;
With mine own tears I wash away my balm,
With mine own hands I give away my crown.”

He again expatiates upon all he surrenders—crown, sceptre, rents, revenues, manors, &c.—annuls in word all his acts, decrees, and laws ; wishes himself dead, and Bolingbroke long life as King. But all this extraordinary language he utters in mingled grief and confusion, perhaps with some lingering hope that detailing his misfortunes and losses will yet arouse sympathy ; and in this idea he was not altogether mistaken, as the sequel proved ; but no feeling for him is openly shown by any one in this scene. Bolingbroke is quite master of the situation, and his eager adherent, Northumberland, not satisfied with Richard’s humiliating resignation, insists on his reading a list of charges against both himself and his followers, and acknowledging their truth.¹ This list of accusations against the captive King is in the play shown to him. In reality he apparently never saw it,

¹ “ Bolingbroke purposed to have Richard solemnly deposed in Parliament for his pretended tyranny and misconduct. A charge of thirty-three articles was accordingly drawn up against him, and presented to that assembly . . . The greater part of these grievances imputed to Richard seems to be the exertion of arbitrary prerogatives.”—Hume’s “ History,” vol. ii.

though it was publicly presented to the Parliament. This last insult rouses the unfortunate King from utter despondency to violent, though despairing rage. Perhaps being so insulted by his former subject, Northumberland, or recollecting his dead favourites, whose offences, probably exaggerated, are now thrust before his eyes, arouses some of the spirit of his race, even at this moment of public shame :

“ KING RICHARD. What more remains ?

NORTHUMBERLAND. No more, but that you read [*offering a paper.*]

These accusations, and these grievous crimes,
Committed by your person, and your followers,
Against the state and profit of this land ;
That, by confessing them, the souls of men
May deem that you are worthily depos’d.

KING RICHARD. Must I do so ? and must I ravel out
My weav’d-up follies ! Gentle Northumberland,
If thy offences were upon record,
Would it not shame thee, in so fair a troop,
To read a lecture of them ? If thou wouldst,
There shouldst thou find one heinous article,
Containing the deposing of a king,
And cracking the strong warrant of an oath,
Mark’d with a blot, damn’d in the Book of Heaven.”

After vehemently reproaching Northumberland and others for treason, he blames himself for having resigned the crown. He asks for a looking-glass, and, gazing at it, exclaims, seeing his own agitated features :

“ KING RICHARD. No deeper wrinkles yet ? Hath sorrow struck
So many blows upon this face of mine,
And made no deeper wounds ?—O, flattering glass,
Like to my followers in prosperity,

Thou dost beguile me !¹ Was this face the face
That every day under his household roof
Did keep ten thousand men ?
Was this the face that fac'd so many follies,
And was at last out-fac'd by Bolingbroke ?
A brittle glory shineth in this face :
As brittle as the glory is the face.²

[*Dashes the glass to the ground.*

For there it is cracked in an hundred shivers.”

Then with hidden meaning, as if foreseeing his own speedy death, he addresses his triumphant rival, who keenly watches this extraordinary scene in composed but observant silence :

“ Mark, silent King, the moral of this sport,
How soon my sorrow hath destroy'd my face.”

Bolingbroke calmly and practically answers his captive cousin :

“ The shadow of your sorrow hath destroy'd
The shadow of your face.”

¹ “ His portrait long remained in the Abbey. It is the oldest contemporary representation of any English sovereign, an unquestionable likeness of the fatal and (as believed at the time,) unparalleled beauty which turned Richard's feeble brain. . . . The curling masses of auburn hair, the large heavy eyes, the long thin nose, the short tufted hair under his smooth chin, the soft and melancholy expression, which suits at once the Richard of history and of Shakespeare.”—Stanley's “ Memorials of Westminster Abbey,” chap. iii.

² Shakespeare follows history here, for Hume writes:—“ Richard's household consisted of ten thousand persons ; he had three hundred in his kitchen. . . . Such prodigality was probably one chief reason of the public discontents” (“ History of England,” vol. ii.).

Richard, whose intensely sensitive nature seems to often leave him at the mercy of others, rejoins :

"Say that again.
The shadow of my sorrow?"

Bolingbroke does not repeat as requested, and Richard proceeds, with pathetic sarcasm :

"Ha! let's see:—

"Tis very true, my grief lies all within,
And these external manners of laments
Are merely shadows to the unseen grief,
That swells with silence in the tortur'd soul:
There lies the substance, and I thank thee, King,
For thy great bounty, that not only giv'st
Me cause to wail, but teachest me the way
How to lament the cause."

He then asks permission to leave this trying scene, and Bolingbroke calmly orders his conveyance to the Tower of London, still preserving, in language and manner, the same studied deference to the captive monarch which he has done throughout, yet which never propitiates or in any way consoles Richard.¹ When he is gone, Bolingbroke announces his approaching coronation, and also retires with his courtiers, leaving three malcontents—the Abbot of Westminster, the Bishop of Carlisle, and Lord

¹ Hume differs from Hallam in thinking that this revolution resembled that against James II. in 1688. He says that the latter movement "deliberately vindicated established privileges," but that the deposing of Richard II. "was the act of a turbulent and barbarous aristocracy, plunging headlong from the extremes of one faction into those of another" ("History of England," vol. ii.). Shakespeare seems to favour Hume's view, but Hallam, having great literary advantages, considering his enlightened times, may be the best authority.

Aumerle—together. They are shocked at the late sad, humiliating scene, and the Abbot hints at some coming opposition to the new King without giving particulars; but several noblemen—Lords Salisbury and Spencer among them—though they were unable or unwilling to prevent Bolingbroke's invasion of England, are indignant at his rapid elevation to the throne. To these men the Abbot probably alludes, and they withdraw to consult and determine on what course to follow.

Act V. opens with a scene probably of Shakespeare's invention—the meeting and parting of Richard and the Queen. The King, with the same morbid melancholy which he has shown ever since his misfortunes, partly relieves and partly indulges grief by dwelling with pathetic minuteness upon their sorrow. He tells her, instead of suggesting either consolation or dignified resignation, to spend the long winter evenings in future in describing his dethronement, and to try to elicit the tearful sympathy of her listeners.

“ KING RICHARD. In winter's tedious nights, sit by the fire
With good old folks: and let them tell thee tales
Of woful ages, long ago betid:
And, ere thou bid good-night, to quit their grief,
Tell thou the lamentable fall of me,
And send the hearers weeping to their beds.”

This meeting is not recorded in history, though, had the Queen been older, much of the conversation attributed to them might naturally have occurred.¹

¹ “The young Queen, daughter of the French King, returned to France soon after the revolution, and was not allowed, even had she

Northumberland, the new King's most zealous subject, separates them, announcing that his master's mind is changed—he orders Richard to Pomfret Castle, and the Queen to return immediately to France. Richard then bitterly reproaches Northumberland—who, of all his subjects, has been the most insolent—and foretells a dangerous quarrel between him and the new King—a prediction which was fatally verified.

“ KING RICHARD. Northumberland, thou ladder wherewithal
The mounting Bolingbroke ascends my throne,
The time shall not be many hours of age
More than it is, ere foul sin, gathering head,
Shall break into corruption : thou shalt think,
Though he divide the realm, and give thee half,
It is too little, helping him to all :
He shall think that thou, which knowest the way
To plant unrightful kings, wilt know again,
Being ne'er so little urg'd another way,
To pluck him headlong from the usurped throne.”

Northumberland, however, listens incredulously, and hurries off the King and Queen in different directions. This scene, though Shakespeare's invention, probably well describes the real feelings of the unfortunate Richard and of his rebellious subject, Northumberland, whose whole object now is to fulfil the new King's wishes and to confirm his power.

The next scene is in the Duke of York's palace, where he describes to his wife, with mixed feelings

wished, to share her deposed husband's imprisonment.”—Hume's “History,” vol. ii. She seems to have been amiable and popular, from Mr. Staunton's account in his notes to the “Illustrated Shakespeare”; but no detail of her parting from Richard is apparently recorded.

of regret and admiration, the public triumph and disgrace of his rival nephews, in their late procession through London.

“ YORK. The Duke, great Bolingbroke,
Mounted upon a hot and fiery steed,
Which his aspiring rider seemed to know,
With slow, but stately pace, kept on his course,
While all tongues cried, “God save thee, Bolingbroke !”

Whilst he, from one side to the other turning,
Bare-headed, lower than his proud steed’s neck,
Bespeak them thus : “ I thank you, countrymen : ”
And thus still doing, thus he pass’d along.

DUCHESS. Alas, poor Richard ! where rode he the whilst ?

YORK. As in a theatre, the eyes of men,
After a well-graced actor leaves the stage,
Are idly bent on him that enters next,
Thinking his prattle to be tedious :
Even so, or with much more contempt, men’s eyes
Did scowl on Richard ; no man cried, “ God save him ! ”
No joyful tongue gave him his welcome home :
But dust was thrown upon his sacred head ;
Which with such gentle sorrow he shook off,
His face still combating with tears and smiles,
The badges of his grief and patience,
That had not God, for some strong purpose, steel’d
The hearts of men, they must perforce have melted,
And barbarism itself have pitied him.
But Heaven hath a hand in these events ;
To whose high will we bound our calm contents.
To Bolingbroke we are sworn subjects now,
Whose state and honour I for aye allow.

DUCHESS. Here comes my son Aumerle.

YORK. Aumerle that was ;
But that is lost, for being Richard’s friend,
And, madam, you must call him Rutland now :
I am in Parliament pledge for his truth,
And lasting fealty to the new-made King.’

York—an excitable and singular man—deeply pities Richard, yet greatly admires Bolingbroke ; the Duchess

sympathises entirely with the deposed King, and shows no admiration for the new monarch, when their son Aumerle enters. This young man, created Duke of Albemarle, or Aumerle, as Shakespeare prefers to call him, by Richard, was deprived of this title by the new government, and styled Earl of Rutland. His conduct during this civil war is somewhat differently described by Shakespeare and Hume—the former representing him faithful to Richard; the latter, with probably more truth, as being treacherous to both his contending cousins. He is now, however, plotting in Richard's behalf, which his father suspects; and, finding a treasonable letter on him, York, despite his wife's entreaties and his son's terror, declares he will reveal all to the new sovereign, whom he has formally acknowledged. York probably feels that it is now hopeless to attempt any revolution in Richard's favour, the new King having the strength of England on his side; and that an insurrection now would only ruin the insurgents and injure the country. He resolves, therefore, to tell all to Bolingbroke, and to trust in his mercy; for he well knows that the new sovereign has no desire to punish him or any of the royal family, but may be induced to do so, and perhaps execute his rebellious cousin, if pressed by Northumberland, and other zealous adherents, to crush all rebellion in the blood of its leaders. Aumerle, whose previous adherence to Richard has apparently been excused by Bolingbroke, also hastens to him, arriving at the palace shortly before his father. Previous to his entrance, the new King (Henry IV.) had revealed

his first disappointment during his present complete triumph. He had asked about his “unthrifty son,” Prince Henry—his heir, the hope, and yet the future vexation, of his troubled life. The inquiry had been provokingly answered by young Hotspur—a youth rather older than Prince Henry, but who, unlike him, assists his father, Northumberland, with all the spirited eagerness of his ardent character.

“ BOLINGBROKE. Can no man tell of my unthrifty son ?
'Tis full three months since I did see him last :
If any plague hang over us, 'tis he.
I would to God, my lords, he might be found :
Inquire at London, 'mongst the taverns there,
For there, they say, he daily doth frequent,
With unrestrained, loose companions.”

It seems strange that Bolingbroke should so openly censure his son before a youth like Percy and the other lords; but he has now little time to lament his son's misconduct. He deplores it for a moment, yet foresees his future amendment, when Aumerle hastily enters his presence. Bolingbroke, having no idea of his treachery, receives him, with some surprise at his hurried manner, admitting him to a private conference with closed doors.

York now arrives, and, with perhaps assumed or exaggerated indignation, confesses to Bolingbroke his son Aumerle's treason, showing him the letter, which reveals some secret plot. Bolingbroke is perplexed at this discovery, and by his strange position between his eager, accusing uncle and his guilty, terrified, supplicating cousin. York warmly requests him not to pardon

his son, when the Duchess arrives, eagerly pleading for Aumerle, while York apparently opposes them both.¹ Bolingbroke hears them all three attentively—perhaps with derision. He doubtless knows that, despite York's apparent eagerness to have Aumerle punished, his hitherto reluctant loyalty will be greatly strengthened by extending unasked clemency to his son and heir. While speaking affectionately to his aunt, the Duchess, he freely pardons Aumerle, but resolves to punish the rest of the conspirators.

" BOLINGBROKE. With all my heart
I pardon him.
DUCHESS. A god on earth thou art.
BOLINGBROKE. Good uncle, help to order several powers
To Oxford, or where'er these traitors are:
They shall not live within this world, I swear,
But I shall have them, if I once know where.
Uncle, farewell—and cousin too, adieu:
Your mother well hath prayed, and prove you true."

Throughout this trying scene, Bolingbroke maintains the same shrewdness and self-control he always displayed, and which, indeed, made him well worthy of

¹ "The scene is ill-conceived, and worse executed throughout, but one line is both atrocious and contemptible. The Duchess having dwelt on the word pardon, and urged the King to let her hear it from his lips, York takes her up with this stupid quibble: 'Speak it in French, King: say, *Pardonnez moi.*'"—Hallam's "Literary History," vol. iii., chap. vi. Mr. Hallam, usually so cool and judicious, is perhaps, hardly fair to Shakespeare here. The quibble, indeed, may be, as he says, stupid and contemptible, yet consistent enough with the character of the eccentric, flighty, trifling York, "the madcap Duke" ("Henry IV."), whom Shakespeare had to represent. It possibly, if not probably, amused the King, who had shown signs of relenting before it was uttered, and it apparently produced the desired effect.

the throne he had acquired. All through this play, wherever he appears, he is evidently the wisest man among either friends or foes. He possesses a daring courage, fully equal to all the fiery, warlike spirits around him, uniting with that splendid gift a firmness of which none can boast in the same degree. He is, perhaps, as a warrior, statesman, and ruler, as grand a specimen of the English character of his unsettled period as could be conceived. When Bolingbroke and his relatives leave the apartment, a certain Sir Pierce of Exton enters it, with an attendant. Exton asks :

“ Didst thou not mark the King, what words he spake ?
Have I no friend will rid me of this living fear ?

And urg'd it twice together, did he not ?
ATTEND. He did.”

Exton proceeds :

“ And speaking it, he wistly look'd on me
As who should say,¹ I would thou wert the man,
That would divorce this terror from my heart ;
Meaning the King at Pomfret. Come, let's go,
I am the King's friend, and will rid ² his foe.”

Exton then declares that he will obey his sovereign's supposed wishes, and starts for Pomfret with avowedly murderous intent, for which even this unscrupulous man cannot say he has sufficient warrant.

The next scene is in Pomfret Castle, where the

¹ “As one who should say.”—Staunton's notes.

² “Get rid of.”—Ibid.

imprisoned King bewails to himself all his griefs, in the same strange manner he had previously done before his own followers, his triumphant foe, and lastly before his Queen. He is now alone, and, without showing either manly resignation or any religious feeling, indulges gloomy thoughts by expressing them in a vague style, revealing a state of mind which might probably have led to insanity, had his prison life been much prolonged.

“ KING RICHARD. I have been studying how I may compare
This prison, where I live, unto the world :
And, for because the world is populous,
And here is not a creature but myself,
I cannot do it ;—yet I'll hammer it out.
. Sometimes am I King ;
Then treason makes me wish myself a beggar,
And so I am : then crushing penury
Persuades me I was better when a king ;
Then am I king'd again : and, by-and-by,
Think that I am unking'd by Bolingbroke,
And straight am nothing.”

His strange reflections, however, are interrupted by a groom's entrance. This man, formerly in Richard's service, greatly pities his luckless master, to whom he has somehow obtained access. He tells the deposed King that on Bolingbroke's coronation-day the new sovereign had ridden one of Richard's horses, which he, as groom in the royal stable, had often harnessed and “ dress'd ” for his use.

“ KING RICHARD. Rode he on Barbary ? Tell me, gentle friend,
How went he under him ?

GROOM. So proudly, as if he disdain'd the ground.

KING RICHARD. So proud that Bolingbroke was on his back !
That jade hath eat bread from my royal hand ;
This hand hath made him proud with clapping him.
Would he not stumble ? Would he not fall down
(Since pride must have a fall), and break the neck
Of that proud man that did usurp his back ?
Forgiveness, horse ! why do I rail on thee,
Since thou, created to be aw'd by man,
Wast born to bear ? ”

This news interests and irritates Richard, when a jailer enters, bringing his food, and orders the groom away, who departs in suspicious terror. This jailer refuses to taste the food first, as he had done previously, saying that orders from the new King have forbade him doing so. Richard, probably suspecting poison, strikes the jailer, who calls for help, and Exton, with armed followers, enter. Richard kills or wounds two of them, when Exton and the others strike him down, mortally wounded. He dies uttering a few noble words, worthy, indeed, of a greater man.

“ KING RICHARD. That hand shall burn in never-quenching fire,
That staggers thus my person.—Exton, thy fierce hand
Hath with the King's blood stain'd the King's own land.
Mount, mount, my soul ! thy seat is up on high !
Whilst my gross flesh sinks downward, here to die. [*Dies.*] ”

Exton, gazing at the dead King, feels momentary remorse, but resolves to bear the body to the new monarch, hoping for and expecting approval of his dreadful deed. This account of Richard's fate, though believed by many, is doubted by Hume and some other historians, for what caused Richard's death was

never known.¹ He certainly died in Pomfret Castle, and, his death being a political advantage, as well as a mental relief to the new monarch, it was suspected that Richard's end was hastened by his direct orders or secret intimations. Yet Bolingbroke was by no means cruel or unscrupulous during the most trying period of his life, and it seems inconsistent with his character to have sullied his triumph by so base a crime as the murder of a prisoner. If Richard were actually assassinated, he might have been poisoned by some zealous adherent of the new King, without any warrant from that monarch himself.² Evidently, there was a report of his murder, which the new King tried to refute by the only means in his power; but it does not seem unlikely that Richard died of a broken heart, considering his position and state of mind; and in this case the fatal workings of "the tortured soul," to use his own words (Act IV.), would not be visible to mortal eye.

The last scene is at Windsor Castle. Bolingbroke—now styled Henry IV.—with his uncle York, is surrounded by ministers and adherents. He is in full triumph, hearing from different messengers the welcome news of the speedy, complete suppression of the revolt raised in behalf of the captive Richard. Northumberland enters, announcing, with his usual zeal, that he has sent to London the heads of Lords

¹ Staunton's notes to the "Illustrated Shakespeare."

² "It is more probable that he was starved to death in prison. . . . This account is more consistent with the story that his body was exposed in public, and that no marks of violence were found upon it."—Hume's "History," vol. ii.

Salisbury, Spencer, Blunt, and Kent, giving in a paper particulars of their capture ; for they were not slain in battle, but deliberately executed. King Henry thanks Northumberland, and then hears from another eager adherent, Lord Fitzwater, of the execution of two more “traitors,” Brocas and Sir Bennet Seely. These men never really engaged the King’s forces, but were betrayed by Aumerle—now called Earl of Rutland—who, anxious to show gratitude for his late pardon, eagerly delivered up his unlucky confederates.¹ The King having also thanked Fitzwater, and promised him reward, next receives the gallant Percy, who, instead of presenting the head, or announcing the execution of some prisoner, brings as a captive the Bishop of Carlisle—the most faithful of Richard’s adherents. Shakespeare makes Henry generously pardon and praise his venerable foe, in words worthy of his position ; yet Hume states that he was imprisoned. When the captive Bishop is before him, Bolingbroke says :

“Carlisle, this is your doom,—
Choose out some secret place, some reverend room,
More than thou hast, and with it joy thy life:
So as thou liv’st in peace, die free from strife
For though mine enemy thou hast ever been,
High sparks of honour in thee have I seen.”

¹ “Rutland appeared carrying on a pole the head of Lord Spencer, his brother-in-law, which he presented in triumph to Henry IV., as a testimony of his loyalty.”—Hume’s “History,” vol. ii. Hume calls Rutland an “infamous man—treacherous to all parties, yet keeping himself on the safe side.”

Probably, however, he was soon after liberated and pardoned, as there is no record of his trial or punishment for certain hostility to the new monarch. Lastly Sir Pierce of Exton enters, with attendants bearing Richard's body under a covering. Exton announces having brought Henry his "buried fear," saying :

"Herein all breathless lies
The mightiest of thy greatest enemies,
Richard of Bordeaux, by me hither brought."

Bolingbroke, shocked, or pretending to be so, replies in sorrowful indignation :

"Exton, I thank thee not. For thou hast wrought
A deed of slander with thy fatal hand,
Upon my head and all this famous land."

Exton retorts :

"From your own mouth, my lord, did I this deed,"

and Bolingbroke replies, whether sincerely or not is impossible to say for certain :

"They love not poison that do poison need,
Nor do I thee ; though I did wish him dead,
I hate the murderer, love him murdered.
The guilt of conscience take thou for thy labour,
But neither my good word nor princely favour :
With Cain go wander through the shades of night,
And never shew thy head by day nor light."

Then, addressing the assembled Court, he exclaims, perhaps with mixed feelings of excitement and

regret, yet perhaps not without a suppressed sense of personal relief, as his life was in constant danger while Richard lived his prisoner :

“Lords, I protest, my soul is full of woe,
That blood should water me to make me grow :
Come, mourn with me for that I do lament,
And put on sullen black incontinent :
I'll make a voyage to the Holy Land,
To wash this blood off from my guilty hand :
March sadly after : grace my mournings here,
In weeping after this untimely bier.”

Yet Historians seem doubtful about Henry's innocence in the matter. Even those most friendly to him cannot deny that the circumstances were suspicious ; while his life was certainly in danger, from the murderous plots of his imprisoned rival's adherents. Nevertheless, the King himself was evidently more merciful, just, and moderate than either ~~his friends or foes~~ were, for in many ways he was worthy of a better age.²

¹ “Henry IV. had been filled with the thought of expiating his usurpation by a Crusade.”—Stanley's “Memorials of Westminster Abbey.”

² “Henry had shown little taste for bloodshed in his conduct of the revolution. Though a deputation of lords, with Archbishop Arundel at their head, pressed him to take Richard's life, he steadily refused, and kept him a prisoner at Pomfret. The judgments against Gloster, Warwick, and Arundel were reversed, but the lords who had appealed to the Duke were only punished by the loss of the dignities which they had received as a reward. In spite of a stormy scene among the lords in Parliament, Henry refused to exact further punishment ; and his real temper was shown in a statute which forbade all such appeals, and left treason to be dealt with by ordinary process of law. But the times were too rough for mercy such as this.

The triumph of the house of Lancaster was now complete. On the English throne sat the illustrious son of the noble John of Gaunt—a prince worthy in many ways of his high position, though, from policy or necessity, often forced to reward men and applaud acts which in better times he would probably have gladly disavowed.¹ Thus Richard's many follies, errors, and weaknesses had ended in dethronement and untimely death. From the first, surrounded by ambitious, fierce, and often hostile kinsmen, this sovereign was in a very difficult position, though, had he shown firmness and prudence, his uncles Gaunt and York might never have been alienated. But his own pride being equal to theirs, he scorned their opinions, distrusted their motives, and placed entire confidence in favourites, who, however faithful to him from interest or duty, were utterly unable to oppose the offended royal family, when allied with the nobles, by influencing the nation at large. In fact, Princes, lords, commons, and people alike resented Richard's partiality to these men, whose destruction was thus an inevitable conse-

Clouds no sooner gathered round the new King than the degraded lords leagued with Salisbury and the deposed Bishop of Carlisle to release Richard and to murder Henry."—Green's "History of the English People," vol. i., chap. v.

¹ "A great council, held after the suppression of the revolt, prayed 'that if Richard, the late King, be alive, as some suppose he is, it be ordained that he be well and securely guarded; but if he be dead, that he be openly showed to the people.' The ominous words were soon followed by news of Richard's death in prison. His body was brought to St. Paul's, Henry himself, with the Princes of the blood royal, bearing the pall."—Green's "History of the English People," vol. i.

quence ; and in their downfall was involved that of their imprudent and ultimately friendless patron.¹

¹ “At the end of this King’s reign it was enacted ‘that every one should be guilty of treason which compasseth the death of the King or to depose him, or to render up his homage or liege, or he that riseth against the King to make war within his realm.’ Nothing is said of any overt act. The trial was to be in Parliament. It is difficult to understand the object of this statute, unless it was to convert into treason mere words, or indeed anything whatever which could be considered to indicate in any way hostility to the King. The Act was passed in 1397, when Richard was, no doubt, fully aware of the dangers which were gathering round him, and which in 1399 led to his deposition. It was repealed ten years afterwards by Henry IV.”
—Stephen’s “English Criminal Law,” chap. xxiii.

V

“FIRST PART OF KING HENRY IV.” (A.D. 1399)

THE first scene describes King Henry gladly hearing of Hotspur's victories over Glendower and his Scottish ally, Earl Douglas. This war, as described by Hume and Shakespeare, caused not only much bloodshed, but occasioned singular alliances between opposing parties. Hotspur, the brave son of Northumberland, the most zealous adherent of Henry IV., after defeating the King's enemies, thought, as did his uncle Worcester and his father, that owing to their great services to Henry they should have more power than that sagacious Prince was willing to grant to them. The discontent of the older men is fully shared by the younger one, and rouses him into fury. He not only refuses to deliver up his prisoners to Henry, which, by his allegiance, he was bound to do,¹ but quarrels with the King because the latter would not “ransom home” his captured brother-in-law, Edmund Mortimer.²

¹ Hume's “History.”

² Mr. Staunton (notes to the “Illustrated Shakespeare”) states that Hotspur was justified by the law of arms in retaining the prisoners, but this may have been a disputed point.

This man—Glendower's captive, and afterwards son-in-law—Henry IV. dreads and distrusts, keeping Mortimer's nephew, Lord March, in prison, knowing their claims to the throne, both by legitimate descent and by the express wish of the late King. Amid so much excitement and warfare, Henry's observant mind perceives the high qualities of his brave young officer and future foe, Hotspur, who first perilled his life in his cause, and soon after was ready to risk it against him. Henry sadly compares this youthful hero to his own dissolute son, whom neither his firm will, example, nor regal power can influence in the least, cordially wishing he could exchange his incorrigible heir for his brave young subject. He evidently feels how thankful he should be could he reckon upon Hotspur's courage, intelligence, and devotion in a dutiful child, instead of in the son of the ambitious, discontented Northumberland, who, as Richard had foreseen, now expected, together with his brother Worcester, an amount of power in return for their services which probably no monarch could safely grant. Hearing from Westmoreland of Hotspur's victories in his cause, Henry exclaims :

‘ Yea, there thou mak'st me sad, and mak'st me sin
In envy that my Lord Northumberland
Should be the father of so blest a son :
A son, who is the theme of honour's tongue ;
Amongst a grove, the very straightest plant ;
Who is sweet fortune's minion, and her pride :
Whilst I, by looking on the praise of him,
See riot and dishonour stain the brow
Of my young Harry. O, that it could be prov'd

That some night-tripping fairy had exchang'd
In cradle-clothes our children where they lay,
And call'd mine Percy, his Plantagenet !
Then would I have his Harry, and he mine."

The formidable discontents of his former adherents forced Henry to seek new friends in Lord Westmoreland, Sir H. Blunt, and others—and to postpone his journey to the Holy Land, which, indeed, he never made, being menaced with fresh revolts, now headed by the Percy family, instead of by hereditary opponents. The King has scarcely ceased admiring Hotspur's bravery, however, when he complains of his unruly conduct to Westmoreland, his cousin, foreseeing the troubles that may yet arise from the powerful house of Percy, hitherto his ardent supporters.

“ KING HENRY. What think you, coz’,
Of this young Percy’s pride? the prisoners
Which he in this adventure hath surpris’d,
To his own use he keeps; and sends me word,
I shall have none but Mordake Earl of Fife.

WESTMORELAND. This is his uncle's teaching, this is Worcester,
Malevolent to you in all respects ;
Which makes him prune himself, and bristle up
The crest of youth against your dignity.

KING HENRY. But I have sent for him to answer this :
And for this cause, awhile we must neglect
Our holy purpose to Jerusalem.
Cousin, on Wednesday next our council we
Will hold at Windsor : and so inform the lords ;
But come yourself with speed to us again ;
For more is to be said, and to be done,
Than out of anger can be uttered."

The second scene introduces Prince Henry, with his favourite associate, Sir John Falstaff, in a London

tavern. This witty old unscrupulous debauchee not only amuses and influences the Prince of Wales, but maintains a sort of ascendancy over his yet more desperate companions—Poins, Peto, and Bardolph. Although these fellows often ridicule his constant boasting and alleged cowardice, he not only participates in all their pranks and robberies, but contrives to obtain more profit and run less risk than any of them.¹ He is both their jester and chief instigator, Prince Henry deriving an amusement from his wit, joking, and effrontery not to be found in the rest of the gang. Of his early history nothing is said by himself or his associates. He appears in the play as an old, very fat, white-bearded man; when hurried or fatigued, almost helpless, from his unwieldy corpulence. Yet his constant wit, fun, and coarse gaiety make him as light-hearted as the Prince himself, and infinitely more merry and diverting than any of his roguish companions. He occupies a sort of middle position between the Prince and his comrades, for though they all laugh at him, he is more familiar with Prince Henry than they are. He is also supposed to have the most influence over the heir apparent, while he is far less venturesome, if not less courageous, than any of his companions. He never shows a really good quality from first to last, being a compound of self-indulgence, falsehood,

¹ “Falstaff’s effrontery is inimitable. He is neither a coward nor courageous. He only asks which will pay best—fighting or running away—and acts accordingly. He evidently had a reputation as a soldier, and was a professed one; was sought out, and got a commission.”—Furnivall’s Introduction to the “Royal Shakespeare.”

licentiousness, and shameless roguery. He has neither a friend nor a bitter enemy, nor apparently does he wish to be either to any one. He knows how to please the Prince, without either flattering or coaxing ; while Poins, Peto, &c., satisfied to see how their comrade amuses the Prince of Wales, doubtless believe themselves all the more secure from either justice or poverty. Falstaff, however, often mentions the much-desired future, when his "sweet wag, Hal," shall be King, and, in half-jest, half-earnest, wishes to know how he and his friends will then be considered and treated under the new *régime*, when their young patron must be, of course, at the head not only of the military and naval forces, but also of the judicial power in the realm.

"FALSTAFF. Marry, then, sweet wag, when thou art King, let not us that are squires of the night's body be called thieves of the day's beauty; let us be—Diana's foresters, gentlemen of the shade, minions of the moon: and let men say, we be men of good government: being governed as the sea is, by our noble and chaste mistress the moon, under whose countenance we—steal.

PRINCE HENRY. Thou say'st well; and it holds well too : for the fortune of us, that are the moon's men, doth ebb and flow like the sea ; being governed as the sea is by the moon. As for proof, now, a purse of gold most resolutely snatched on Monday night, and most dissolutely spent on Tuesday morning : got with swearing—lay by ; and spent with crying—bring in : now, in as low an ebb as the foot of the ladder ; and, by and by, in as high a flow as the ridge of the gallows."

There is great cunning in these hints of Falstaff, but Prince Henry, with a shrewdness not unworthy of his cautious father, always evades the subject, usually talking of present times with as much wild recklessness as his knavish associates can wish, but preserving

a steady silence about his and their own future positions. Thus, throughout all their gay conversations from first to last, the Prince never makes Falstaff or his friends the least promise of future favour, or even protection, while diverting himself with their wit and profligacy to the fullest extent. In this first scene he asks Falstaff when they shall attempt their next robbery; calls him and Poins “Jack” and “Ned,” and is called by the former “Hal,” and “sweet wag,” in return. Poins, the boldest of the party, proposes, chiefly to amuse the Prince, to incite Falstaff and his comrades to waylay and rob some peaceful travellers, who, he knows, will be on the high road near Rochester early next morning; and that after this the Prince and he should despoil their associates, though not apparently to repay the plundered people. Henry eagerly agrees, and they first resolve to amuse themselves at the expense both of the travellers and of their own comrades.

When the Prince is alone, after Poins leaves him, he utters a remarkable soliloquy, which Shakespeare introduces to explain the wonderful change which really came over the wild young man in after life.

“PRINCE HENRY. I know you all, and will awhile uphold
The unyok’d humour of your idleness ;
Yet herein will I imitate the sun,
Who doth permit the base, contagious clouds
To smother up his beauty from the world,
That, when he please again to be himself,
Being wanted, he may be more wonder’d at,
By breaking through the foul and ugly mists
Of vapours that did seem to strangle him.

So, when this loose behaviour I throw off,
 And pay the debt I never promised,
 By how much better than my word I am,
 By so much shall I falsify men's hopes ;
 And like bright metal on a sullen ground,
 My reformation, glittering o'er my fault,
 Shall show more goodly, and attract more eyes,
 Than that which hath no foil to set it off."

From historical record, the change in him seems to have been chiefly caused by the last words of his father as well as by his altered position, when monarch, immediately on hearing them.¹ Yet though constantly associating with Falstaff and his set, he never shows the least shame or disgust either at their licentious talk, profligacy, or dishonesty, all of which he indeed encourages, by free participation or by jeering applause. Although his speech to himself sounds grand—even noble—in Shakespeare's splendid words, yet, when considered in relation both to his conduct and position, it surely deserves neither praise nor indulgence. Satisfying his too easy conscience by purposing reformation, he never considers the vile example every hour of his life sets even to his younger brothers—none of whom, happily, follow it—nor the

¹ According to Hume, Henry IV., through jealousy, excluded his heir from all share in public business, and "was even displeased to see him at the head of armies, where his martial talents might prove dangerous to his own authority. The active spirit of young Henry, restrained from its proper exercise, broke out into extravagancies of every kind . . . There even remains a tradition that, when heated with liquor and jollity, he scrupled not to accompany his riotous associates in attacking the passengers on the streets and highways, and despoiling them of their goods, and he found an amusement in the incidents which the terror and regret of these defenceless people produced on such occasions."—"History of England," chap. xix.

grief and shame, if not danger, which it causes to his toil-worn father, to whose sense and energy he owes alike his present position and high expectations. He flatters himself that the more dissolute he now is the more noble will his altered conduct make him appear in future ~~forgetting that he might die at any moment,~~ leaving a reputation disgraceful and even dangerous to his family and the nation.]

Prince Henry, however, at this wild time of his life, probably never felt the emotions ascribed to him. All his conduct as recorded both in history and the play proves that while Prince of Wales, without real power, yet the certain heir to the crown, he indulged his spirits and exuberant energies, which were checked by his cautious father, in wild excess and with dissolute companions. He fortunately, however, never seemed to wish either his brothers or any of the young nobility to join him in his wild way of life. He somehow found out or was introduced to Falstaff, Poins, &c., and, taking them as they were, threw himself headlong into their society, talked like them, acted with them, and lived chiefly among them, thus avoiding both his father's friends and enemies. Doubtless had he, like some heirs apparent, complained of his father's harshness or jealousy, he would soon have found many dissatisfied, cunning statesmen ready and willing to encourage his discontent and flatter his pride, for the sake of possible future favour. Prince Henry does nothing of the sort. He leaves his father's Court and council-chamber, entirely devoting his time and company to a set of companions far too contemptible

and despised to endanger the King's authority in any way.

Yet both in history and in the play he showed, even when a youth, great military talents, which the formidable rebellions against his father soon called into action ; for the next scene introduces the memorable and predicted quarrel between Henry IV. and the Percy family—the “ladder,” as Richard II. called them, by which he had ascended the throne. The Earls of Worcester and Northumberland come before him with their son and nephew, Hotspur. The King sternly declares that henceforth he will make them fear him, to which Worcester bitterly replies that owing to their assistance he is now on the throne. The irritated King makes no reply, save by dismissing Worcester instantly from his presence.

“WORCESTER. Our house, my sovereign liege, little deserves
The scourge of greatness to be used on it ;
And that same greatness too which our own hands
Have help to make so portly.

KING HENRY. Worcester, get thee gone, for I do see
Danger and disobedience in thine eye.

You have good leave to leave us ; when we need
Your use and counsel we shall send for you.”

Northumberland says little, being evidently confounded at this breach between his family and the King, for whom they had done so much. Hotspur, with the rash boldness of his nature, now vindicates himself for withholding the prisoners. He sharply ridicules the royal messenger who had demanded their surrender, and Henry, who hears his spirited speech, perceives no sign of submission in it.

“ HOTSPUR. My liege, I did deny no prisoners. But, I remember, when the fight was done, When I was dry with rage and extreme toil, Breathless and faint, leaning upon my sword, Came there a certain lord, neat, and trimly dress'd. He was perfumèd like a milliner ; And as the soldiers bore dead bodies by, He called them untaught knaves, unmannerly.

With many holiday and lady terms
He questioned me ; among the rest, demanded
My prisoners, in your Majesty's behalf.
I then, all smarting with my wounds being cold,
To be so pester'd with a popinjay,
Out of my grief and my impatience,
Answer'd neglectingly, I know not what ;
He should, or should not ;—for he made me mad, careless
To see him shine so brisk, and smell so sweet,
And talk so like a waiting gentlewoman
Of guns, and drums, and wounds (God save the mark !) ;
. . . . And, but for these vile guns
He would himself have been a soldier.
This bald unjointed chat of his, my lord,
I answered indirectly, as I said ;
And, I beseech you, let not his report
Come current for an accusation,
Betwixt my love and your high Majesty.”

Henry, irritated at his boldness, sternly refuses Hotspur's previous request that his brother-in-law, Mortimer, now Glendower's captive, should be “ransomed home,” in return for obtaining Hotspur's prisoners. Henry even accuses Mortimer of treason against him, knowing the claims of his family to the throne, although Mortimer was captured while fighting in his service against Glendower. Hotspur instantly and vehemently repudiates this charge of treason against Mortimer, praising him highly, when the incensed King forbids him ever to mention Mortimer

again, thus revealing his secret fear of that personage, and angrily leaves the apartment with his courtiers.

"KING HENRY. I shall never hold that man my friend
Whose tongue shall ask me for one penny cost
To ransom home revolted Mortimer.

HOTSPUR. Revolted Mortimer!

He never did fall off, my sovereign liege,
But by the chance of war ;—To prove that true
Needs no more but one tongue for all those wounds,
Those mouthed wounds, which valiantly he took,
When on the gentle Severn's sedgy bank,
In single opposition, hand to hand,
He did confound the best part of an hour
In changing hardiment with great Glendower.

Never did base and rotten policy
Colour her working with such deadly wounds ;
Nor never could the noble Mortimer
Receive so many, and all willingly :
Then let him not be slander'd with revolt.

KING HENRY. Thou dost belie him, Percy, thou dost
belie him,
He never did encounter with Glendower.

Art thou not ashamed ? But, sirrah, henceforth
Let me not hear you speak of Mortimer :
Send me your prisoners with the speediest means,
Or you shall hear in such a kind from me
As will displease you.—My Lord Northumberland,
We license your departure with your son :—
Send us your prisoners or you'll hear of it.

[*Exeunt KING HENRY and train.*

HOTSPUR. And if the devil come and roar for them,
I will not send them."

Northumberland and his son are now joined by Worcester. These chiefs of the Percy family own how different the reigning Henry IV. has become from the disinherited invader Bolingbroke, whom they had so zealously supported up to the present moment. On

the other hand, it might be said that no English King could endure the dictation, or satisfy the demands, of such ambitious subjects, with honour to himself or safety to the realm. In this remarkable scene the older men are calm, thoughtful, and sad—Northumberland especially; while Hotspur denounces the King with a vehemence which neither father nor uncle can restrain, though they both attempt it.

“HOTSPUR. But shall it be that you, that set the crown
Upon the head of this forgetful man,
And, for his sake, wear the detested blot
Of murd’rous subornation—shall it be,
That you a world of curses undergo?

Shall it, for shame, be spoken in these days,
Or fill up chronicles in time to come,
That men of your nobility and power
Did ‘gage them both in an unjust behalf—
As both of you, God pardon it! have done—
To put down Richard, that sweet lovely rose,
And plant this thorn, this canker, Bolingbroke?
And shall it, in more shame, be further spoken,
That you are fool’d, discarded, and shook off
By him for whom these shames ye underwent?
No, yet time serves wherein you may redeem
Your banish’d honour and restore yourselves
Into the good thoughts of the world again.”

After thus blaming his father and uncle for having deposed Richard and supported Bolingbroke—to which reproach his saddened relatives listen for some time in repentant silence—the fiery young man continues to abuse the King so eagerly that he cannot even listen to a new plot against him, which the crafty Worcester already devises. Northumberland urges him to be patient, and hear his uncle, when his

impatient son exclaims, alluding to Bolingbroke's last words to him :

" He said he would not ransom Mortimer :
Forbade my tongue to speak of Mortimer."

Then in almost comic anger, yet in bold defiance and quite sincerely, the impetuous Hotspur proceeds :

" But I will find him when he lies asleep,
And in his ear I'll holloa—‘ *Mortimer!* ’
Nay, I'll have a starling shalt be taught to speak ¹
Nothing but ‘ *Mortimer* ’ and give it him,
To keep his anger still in motion."

His uncle Worcester, after vainly trying to get the passionate Hotspur to hear him, exclaims :

" Farewell, kinsman ! I will talk to you
When you are better temper'd to attend,"

while his father, Northumberland, attempts to reason with him, exclaiming truly :

" Why, what a wasp-stung and impatient fool
Art thou to break into this woman's mood,
Tying thine ear to no tongue but thine own " ;

while his son vehemently proceeds:

" Why, look you, I am whipp'd and scourg'd with rods,
Nettled, and stung with pismires, when I hear
Of this vile politician, Bolingbroke.
In Richard's time—what do you call the place ?

¹ Writing on the starling, Mr. Yarrell says : " The males are often kept in confinement, where they learn to whistle tunes and imitate some of the various sounds of the human voice with facility and correctness " (" British Birds," vol. ii.).

A plague upon 't!—it is in Gloucestershire;
'Twas where the madcap Duke his uncle kept;
His uncle York; where I first bowed my knee
Unto this king of smiles, this Bolingbroke—'s blood!—
When you and he came back from Ravenspurg.

NORTHUMBERLAND. At Berkley Castle.

HOTSPUR. You say true:—
Why, what a candy deal of courtesy
This fawning greyhound then did proffer me!
Look—*when his infant fortune came to age,*
And, *gentle Harry Percy*—and, *kind cousin*—
O, the devil take such cozeners!—God forgive me!—
Good uncle, tell your tale, for I have done.”

Worcester is now the most crafty, if not the most eager plotter, Hotspur being too angry to talk about anything coolly; while Northumberland, once so zealous and vehement, says little, and perhaps can hardly yet fully realise the fact of this complete breach between them and the Prince whom they have raised to the throne. For their past conduct they are reproached warmly, yet respectfully, by Hotspur, in ardent language, which they cannot refute, and which evidently produces its silent, yet powerful effect; as Worcester interrupts him with his plot against the King, which his nephew is too excited to hear. When he cools, he highly praises Worcester's plan of a future insurrection; while Northumberland agrees with them only in a few words, being evidently overcome by disappointment and regret.

The Percy family then part company, resolved upon declaring war against Henry and allying themselves with Glendower, Mortimer, Earl Douglas, and the Archbishop of York, whose brother, Sir Stephen Scroop, being lately executed for treason, joins the

more eagerly in the plot against the King. The fiery spirit of Hotspur, the craft of Worcester, and the sad decision of the once active, zealous Northumberland, are strikingly contrasted in this important scene, clearly indicating a coming storm.

“WORCESTER. And 'tis no little reason bids us speed,
To save our heads by raising of a head ;
For, bear ourselves as even as we can,
The King will always think him in our debt ;
And think we think ourselves unsatisfied,
Till he hath found a time to pay us home.
And see already how he doth begin
To make us strangers to his looks of love.

HOTSPUR. He does, he does ; we'll be revenged on him.

WORCESTER. Cousin, farewell ;—no further go in this
Than I by letters shall direct your course.
When time is ripe (which will be suddenly),
I'll steal to Glendower and Lord Mortimer ;
Where you and Douglas and our powers at once,
As I will fashion it, shall happily meet,
To bear our fortunes in our strong arms,
Which now we hold at much uncertainty.

NORTHUMBERLAND. Farewell, good brother : we shall thrive,
I trust.

HOTSPUR. Uncle, adieu :—O, let the hours be short,
Till fields and blows and groans applaud our sport !”

Richard II.'s prediction is now fully verified, and henceforth the King and his earliest adherents, the Percies, are implacable and, indeed, mortal foes.

Act II. changes to Rochester, where Prince Henry, Falstaff, Poins, Gadshill, Peto and Bardolph meet together. The Prince and Poins, by pre-arrangement, conceal and disguise themselves, while Falstaff and the others rob some luckless travellers, who make no resistance, and the thieves hope to divide the booty among themselves.

When attacked, the poor travellers, probably unarmed or helpless people, exclaim in real terror, though their lives are in no danger :

“O, we are undone, both we and ours for ever,”

and Falstaff, longing to plunder them, replies, pretending to frighten them and believing them to be rich :

“Hang ye, gorbellied knaves,¹ are ye undone? No, ye fat chuffs, I would your store were here! On, bacons, on! What, ye knaves! young men must live; you are grandjurors are ye? We'll jure ye, i' faith!”

[*Exeunt FALSTAFF, and others, driving them out.*]

The Prince, always amused with Falstaff, exclaims to Poins, evidently enjoying the scene :

“The thieves have bound the true men. Now could thou and I rob the thieves and go merrily to London, it would be argument for a week, laughter for a month, and a good jest for ever.”

The Prince and Poins retire, when the thieves re-enter.

“FALSTAFF. Come, my masters, let us share, and then to horse before day. An the Prince and Poins be not two arrant cowards, there's no equity stirring: there's no more valour in that Poins than in a wild-duck.

PRINCE HENRY and POINS (*rushing out upon them*). Your money!

POINS. Villains!

[*They all run away, and FALSTAFF, after a blow or two, runs away too, leaving the booty behind them.*]

PRINCE HENRY. Got with much ease. Now merrily to horse: The thieves are scatter'd, and possess'd with fear

¹ “Pot-bellied.”—Staunton's notes.

So strongly, that they dare not meet each other ;
 Each takes his fellow for an officer.
 Away, good Ned. Falstaff sweats to death,
 And lards the lean earth as he walks along ;
 Were 't not for laughing, I should pity him.
 POINS. How the rogue roar'd !"

Thus while Falstaff and the others were about to share their booty, the Prince and Poins, having far more courage than the rest, attack them, and seize it. Falstaff and the others, not knowing them, run off as fast as the fat knight can, leaving the Prince and Poins to enjoy the success of their trick.

The next scene is in Hotspur's castle, whence he is actively corresponding with the other leaders of the coming revolt. He hints that York secretly favours his enterprise against the King, but this may not be historically true. Hotspur reads extracts from a letter of some prudent or timid ally,¹ making amusing, angry comments which well display his impatient, daring character :

"*The purpose you undertake is dangerous.*" Why, that's certain ; 'tis dangerous to take a cold, to sleep, to drink, but I tell you, my lord fool, out of this nettle danger we pluck the flower safety. '*The friends you have named uncertain ; the time itself unsorted, and your whole plot too light for the counterpoise of so great an opposition.*' Say you so ? I say unto you again, you are a shallow, cowardly hind. . . . By the Lord, our plot is a good plot as ever was laid ; our friends true and constant, . . . an excellent plot, very good friends ! Why, my lord of York commends the plot. . . . Is there not my father, my uncle and myself ? Lord Edmund Mortimer, my lord of York and Owen Glendower ? . . . What a pagan rascal is this ! . . . Ha ! you shall see now in very sincerity of fear and cold heart will he to the King and lay open all our proceedings. . . . Hang him ! let him tell the King. We are prepared ; I will set forward to-night."

¹ "Supposed to be the Earl of March."—Staunton's notes.

The leaders are his uncle Worcester, Glendower, and Mortimer—who, though captured by Glendower, is now his friend and son-in-law—aided by Earl Douglas with some Scottish troops; while Northumberland, though favouring the revolt, does not take the field. Hotspur’s wife, Lady Percy, vainly tries to discover her warlike husband’s designs, but he gently, yet firmly refuses to disclose them, being evidently uneasy about his chance of success, though his intrepid nature is incapable of fear.

“LADY PERCY. I’ faith,
I’ll know your business, Harry, that I will.
I fear, my brother Mortimer doth stir
About his title; and hath sent for you.”

Hotspur persists in concealing his plans, at length exclaiming :

“But hark you, Kate;
I must not have you henceforth question me
Whither I go, nor reason whereabout;
Whither I must, I must; and, to conclude,
This evening I must leave you, gentle Kate.
I know you wise; but yet no further wise
Than Harry Percy’s wife: constant you are,
But yet a woman: and for secrecy,
No lady closer: for I well believe
Thou wilt not utter what thou dost not know.”

He sets off to Wales immediately, his wife agreeing to follow him next day, his high spirit and ardent mind being now devoted to the cause of the “down-trod Mortimer,” his brother-in-law, whose nephew, Lord March, is a prisoner in the King’s power. This Prince had been named by Richard II. as his heir, yet the Percies apparently never thought of his claims

till their own quarrel with the King, whose usurpation they had so zealously supported.

After this slight glance at the stirring history of the times, Shakespeare describes fresh scenes in the London tavern at Eastcheap, where are assembled the Prince and his dissolute companions. The former and Poins now expect much amusement from Falstaff at being deserted, as he thinks, by them, and thereby losing his booty, which he believes has been stolen by some bolder thieves than those who compose his gang. He accordingly enters the tavern where they usually assemble, sulky and fretful, accusing the Prince and Poins of deserting him and the others just as they had secured a rich prize.

“ FALSTAFF. A plague of all cowards, I say, and a vengeance too ! marry, and amen !—Give me a cup of sack, boy. . . . A plague of all cowards, I say, still.

PRINCE HENRY. Why, you round man, what’s the matter ?

FALSTAFF. Are not you a coward ? answer me to that ; and Poins there ?

POINS. 'Zounds, ye fat paunch, an' ye call me coward, by the Lord, I'll stab thee.

FALSTAFF. I call thee coward ! I'll see thee damned ere I call thee coward : but I would give a thousand pound I could run as fast as thou canst. You are straight enough in the shoulders, you care not who sees your back : Call you that backing of your friends ? A plague upon such backing ! give me them that will face me. Give me a cup of sack :—I am a rogue if I drunk to-day.

PRINCE HENRY. O, villain ! thy lips are scarce wiped since thou drunk’st last.

FALSTAFF. All’s one for that. A plague of all cowards, still say I.”

In assumed ignorance, Prince Henry asks how he lost the booty, and Falstaff invents a story, first of two robbers attacking him, and, increasing the number,

as he apparently thinks himself believed, ends by declaring that not less than eleven men, in buckram suits, seized the plunder he had just secured, and that he had no chance against so many, though he slew several before he ran for his life. These absurd lies highly amuse the listeners, and even Falstaff is evidently gratified, despite his disappointment, at seeing the Prince and his comrades so diverted at such wonderful effrontery. The Prince, however, after hearing his version, tells the truth, confirmed by Poins, about his running away, jeeringly asking what excuse he can now make for undeniable cowardice. At this question, Falstaff, never taken aback by any one, immediately declares that he knew the Prince was one of his despoilers, and, of course, never thought of resisting him, but loyally ran away.

“PRINCE HENRY. Mark now, how a plain tale shall put you down.—Then did we two set on you four: and with a word, out-faced you from your prize, and have it; yea, and can show it you here in the house:—and, Falstaff, you carried yourself away as nimbly, and with as quick dexterity, and roared for mercy, and still ran and roared, as ever I heard bull-calf. What a slave art thou to hack thy sword as thou hast done; and then say, it was in fight! What trick, what device, what starting-hole, canst thou now find out, to hide thee from this open and apparent shame?

POINS. Come, let’s hear, Jack: What trick hast thou now?

FALSTAFF. By the Lord, I knew ye as well as He that made ye. Why, hear ye, my masters: Was it for me to kill the heir apparent? Should I turn upon the true Prince? Why, thou knowest I am as valiant as Hercules: but beware instinct; the lion will not touch the true Prince. Instinct is a great matter; I was a coward on instinct. I shall think the better of myself, and thee, during my life; I for a valiant lion, and thou for a true prince. But, lads, I am glad you have the money.—Hostess, clap to the doors; watch to-night, pray to-morrow.—Gallants, lads, boys, hearts of gold, all

the titles of good fellowship come to you! What, shall we be merry? shall we have a play extempore?

PRINCE HENRY. Content; and the argument shall be, thy running away.

FALSTAFF. Ah! no more o' that, Hal, an' thou lovest me."

In the midst of all this merriment, a messenger comes from the Court, asking to see the Prince, who sends Falstaff to speak to him, while he jests and laughs with his companions about Sir John's boasting and cowardice, he being their constant subject for merriment, and occasional practical jokes. Falstaff soon re-enters with political news about the sudden rebellion of Worcester and Northumberland, who, with Hotspur, are now allied with Douglas and Glendower, against the King. Prince Henry, who is brave as a lion, hears all this news, and also the likelihood of his soon having to head the royal troops, with perfect coolness, still amusing himself with Falstaff, who now pretends to speak like the King, and reproves the Prince, advising him to leave all his wild companions except himself. The other thieves say little, but probably watch this strange scene with more interest than amusement. Prince Henry then pretends to be his father, and censures Falstaff—who, in turn, personates the Prince—for associating with such an old sinner, on which the old knight comically defends himself at the expense of his less witty comrades, who hear all this performance without speaking.

"PRINCE HENRY. Now, Harry? whence come ye?

FALSTAFF. My noble lord, from Eastcheap.

PRINCE HENRY. The complaints I hear of thee are grievous.

FALSTAFF. 'Sblood, my lord, they are false :—nay, I'll tickle ye for a young prince, faith.

PRINCE HENRY. Swearest thou, ungracious boy? henceforth ne'er look on me. Thou art violently carried away from grace: there is a devil haunts thee, in the likeness of a fat old man. . . . Wherein is he good, but to taste sack and drink it? wherein cunning, but in craft? wherein crafty, but in villainy? wherein villainous, but in all things? wherein worthy, but in nothing?

FALSTAFF. I would your grace would take me with you. Whom mean your grace?

PRINCE HENRY. That villainous abominable misleader of youth, Falstaff, that old white-bearded Satan.

FALSTAFF. My lord, the man I know.

PRINCE HENRY. I know thou dost.

FALSTAFF. But to say I know more harm in him than in myself, were to say more than I know. . . . No, my good lord; banish Peto, banish Bardolph, banish Poins; but for sweet Jack Falstaff, kind Jack Falstaff, true Jack Falstaff, valiant Jack Falstaff, and therefore more valiant, being as he is, old Jack Falstaff, banish not him thy Harry's company; banish plump Jack, and banish all the world."

Suddenly, however, they are all startled by the entrance of Mrs. Quickly, their hostess, announcing that the sheriff and his men are at the door, meaning to search the house, at which news Falstaff and the others hide themselves, leaving the Prince and Peto to receive the unwelcome official. The Prince hears that he seeks a man of Falstaff's description, on account of the late robbery near Rochester. Henry equivocates by declaring that Falstaff is not there, and thus prevents the house being searched. He promises the sheriff, however, that he will send Sir John to him next day, and meantime asks him to depart, which he does, leaving the Prince and Peto together, while Falstaff has fallen

“Fast asleep behind the arras.”

They rifle his pockets, and laugh over the bills which they find there; after which the Prince, thinking of graver matters, declares he will go to the Court next day, for all must take part in the coming civil war; that he will procure an infantry command for Falstaff; and that the stolen money must be returned to the claiming travellers. Thus ends this extraordinary scene, in which the heir to the English Crown jests, laughs, and enjoys himself with reckless, dissolute companions, encouraging all their revelry by his presence and participation, but without making to any of them the least promise of future favour or even safety. Yet they must all know that their liberties, if not their lives, are in constant danger, even from the irregular and ill-administered laws of the period. The Prince diverts his active mind and restless spirit with these unworthy associates, as if resolved not to trouble his jealous father by interfering in public affairs, as the King, though often regretting his wildness, never really allowed him to assist in the government.¹

The next scene introduces the insurgent leaders—Hotspur, Worcester, Mortimer, and Glendower. These four, though in league against Henry IV., are none of them his equals in combined valour and politic wisdom. In personal courage Hotspur is unsurpassed, but is too impetuous to be as formidable as he would otherwise have been. Worcester is more of a wily politician than a soldier. Edmund Mortimer was more known as a warrior than as a statesman,

¹ Hume's "History," vol. ii.

while Owen Glendower, though brave, energetic, and persevering, was unfitted for power over Englishmen, of whom Hotspur was in many respects a fine specimen. The Welsh chief somewhat resembled the Celtic princes in Ossian’s poems—fanciful and superstitious, with absurd notions of his own supernatural powers, derived from faithful adherents, and imbibed from songs and local traditions. His ideas, therefore, are keenly ridiculed by the practical Hotspur, as they would have been doubtless by many of the youth of England, though perhaps not generally with such blunt, even insolent impatience.

“GLENDOWER.

At my nativity,

The front of heaven was full of fiery cressets : and, at my birth,
The frame and huge foundation of the earth
Shak’d like a coward.

HOTSPUR. Why, so it would have done at the same season, if your mother’s cat had but kitten’d, though yourself had never been born.

GLENDOWER. I say, the earth did shake when I was born.

HOTSPUR. And I say, the earth was not of my mind,
If you suppose, as fearing you it shook.

GLENDOWER. The heavens were all on fire, the earth did tremble.

HOTSPUR. O, then the earth shook to see the heavens on fire,
And not in fear of your nativity.

GLENDOWER. Cousin, of many men
I do not bear these crossings. Give me leave
To tell you once again—that at my birth,
The front of heaven was full of fiery shapes ;
The goats ran from the mountains, and the herds
Were strangely clamorous to the frightened fields.
These signs have mark’d me extraordinary :
And all the courses of my life do show
I am not in the roll of common men.

HOTSPUR. I think there is no man speaks better Welsh : I will to dinner.

MORTIMER. Peace, cousin Percy : you will make him mad.

GLENDOWER. I can call spirits from the vasty deep.

HOTSPUR. Why, so can I ; or so can any man :
But will they come when you do call for them ?

GLENDOWER. Why, I can teach thee, cousin, to command
The devil.

HOTSPUR. And I can teach thee, coz, to shame the devil,
By telling truth ; *Tell truth, and shame the devil.*—
If thou have power to raise him, bring him hither,
And I'll be sworn I have power to shame him hence.
O, while you live, *tell truth and shame the devil.*"

These singular allies soon quarrel about the practical subject of territorial divisions in England and Wales between themselves, should they overcome the existing government. Glendower, evidently used to great respect, if not adulation, from his Welsh followers, is irritated at Hotspur's contempt for him ; while the latter despises the chieftain with all the fiery scorn of his impetuous temper. The Welsh chief proudly boasts, in answer to Hotspur's taunt, that he cannot speak good English, of having been "trained up" at Richard II.'s Court, which was historically true,¹ and he was ever after devoted to the deposed monarch. For, unlike Worcester and Northumberland, he had never acknowledged Henry IV.'s usurpation, being his consistent foe, but now finds himself strangely allied with the new King's former adherents.

" GLENDOWER. For I was train'd up in the English Court :
Where, being but young, I framed to the harp
Many an English ditty, lovely well,
And gave the tongue a helpful ornament ;
A virtue that was never seen in you.

HOTSPUR. Marry,
And I'm glad of it with all my heart :
I had rather be a kitten and cry *Mew*,
Than one of these same metre ballad-mongers."

¹ Staunton's notes to the "Illustrated Shakespeare."

Worcester and Mortimer, both less vehement than the others, make peace between them; while Glendower's daughter, Lady Mortimer, and Hotspur's wife, Lady Percy, Mortimer's sister, soothe and entertain their anxious relatives with music, for which the blunt, fiery Hotspur has neither taste nor talent.

The next scene describes an interview between Henry IV. and the Prince of Wales, in London, founded on fact, though expressed in Shakespeare's noble language. Henry reproaches his son, more in sorrow than in anger, about his habits, tastes, and society; tells him that his younger brothers have to take his place in the council, and frankly reveals how he himself, when a young man about the Prince's age, had acquired popularity throughout the nation. Prince Henry, to calm his agitated father, promises reformation, which, however, he does not intend at present, Falstaff's society still having a charm for him, and he never alters during his father's life. The King, whose observant mind keenly examines friends and foes, then tells his son that his conduct reminds him of his reckless predecessor, Richard II. It must have been peculiarly galling to this wise sovereign to perceive, when in middle age and oppressed with endless cares, similar faults and follies in his own son, of which his superior mind had taken such advantage when triumphing over his former rival. He seems, indeed, to apprehend in this resemblance a sort of retributive justice.

“KING HENRY. For all the world,
As thou art to this hour, was Richard then.

When I from France set foot at Ravenspurg ;
 And even as I was then is Percy now.
 Now, by my sceptre, and my soul to boot,
 He hath more worthy interest to the state,
 Than thou the shadow of succession.

And what say you to this ? Percy, Northumberland,
 The Archbishop's Grace of York, Douglas, Mortimer,
 Capitulate against us, and are up.
 But wherefore do I tell these news to thee ?
 Why, Harry, do I tell thee of my foes,
 Which art my near'st and dearest enemy ?

Thou dost, in thy passages of life,
 Make me believe, that thou art only mark'd
 For the hot vengeance and the rod of heaven
 To punish my mistreadings."

While blaming and exhorting his son with all his energy, he reveals no idea of attempting to effect his disinheritance. Yet for this course he has many inducements, his three other sons being all dutiful contrasts to the eldest, never joining in his wild life, but devoted to their father's interests and their own. King Henry acknowledges the Prince's rights firmly, though with anxiety, grief, and apprehension, as his heir's faults are peculiarly difficult and painful for him to deal with.¹ For the Prince never shows a mutinous spirit against his father ; never encourages, by word or deed, any disaffection—a course only too common for heirs apparent to follow, as the troubled King well knows. Henry, therefore, cannot reasonably suspect

¹ "The King saw in his son's behaviour the same neglect of decency, the same attachment to low company, which had degraded the personal character of Richard II., and which, more than all his errors in government, had tended to overturn his throne."—Hume's "History," chap. xix.

him of treason or active enmity. It is the future disgrace and misery of England which his son's conduct and character hitherto cause all men to apprehend, and which the courageous King dreads more than any of his numerous and powerful foes. This constant fear, indeed, both in history and the play, is a greater affliction to the vigorous mind of Henry IV. than any other grief, trial, or danger could have been to a spirit so firm and self-reliant. During this conversation, however, Prince Henry, roused by the exciting perils of the time, and really inheriting all the martial spirit of his family, satisfies and even gratifies his father more than he had ever done. The idea of warfare, indeed, both in his youth and prime, surpassed all other attractions for Henry. In times of peace, his reckless love of dissipation resembled that of his remote successor, Charles II., though, whereas the latter revelled and jested among profligate courtiers and ladies of ennobled rank, Prince Henry preferred the society of a witty rogue like Falstaff, and coarse, boasting desperadoes like Poins, Peto, &c. War, however, diverted him from all such company, for a short time, even while Prince of Wales, but permanently when King of England. On this occasion, he again promises his father not only reformation, but active assistance, the King believing what he says, and trusting that the promised change may be permanent. The father and son, now quite agreed, decide upon the plan of the campaign, and are for a time sincerely reconciled, owing chiefly to the common danger which besets them.

The next scene reverts to Mrs. Quickly's Boar's Head Tavern, where Falstaff declares he has lost his purse, upon which the hostess reproaches him for not only slandering her house, but owing her money.

"HOSTESS. The tithe of a hair was never lost in my house before.

FALSTAFF. You lie, hostess; Bardolph was shaved, and lost many a hair: and I'll be sworn my pocket was picked: go to, you are a woman, go.

HOSTESS. Who, I? I defy thee: I was never called so in mine own house before.

FALSTAFF. Go to, I know you well enough.

HOSTESS. No, Sir John; you do not know me, Sir John: I know you, Sir John; you owe me money, Sir John, and now you pick a quarrel to beguile me of it: I bought a dozen shirts to your back.

FALSTAFF. Dowlas, filthy dowlas: I have given them away to bakers' wives, and they have made bolters¹ of them.

HOSTESS. Now, as I am a true woman, holland of eight shillings an ell. You owe money here besides, Sir John, for your diet and by-drinkings, and money lent you, four and twenty pounds.

FALSTAFF. He [Bardolph] had his part of it, let him pay.

HOSTESS. He? alas, he is poor! he hath nothing.

FALSTAFF. How! poor? look upon his face; what call you rich? let him coin his nose, let him coin his cheeks; I'll not pay a denier."

This woman constantly quarrels with Falstaff, who usually gets the best of the argument. Their language, like that of Poins, Peto, &c., is alike coarse and odious, when not relieved by Falstaff's extraordinary wit, cunning, and quaint remarks. It is he whose influence over, or rather attraction for, the Prince maintains this anything but respectable party in the tavern; for Mrs. Quickly, though distrusting them all, and equally scorned by them in return, is naturally

¹ Bolters are sieves, nothing could better express the coarseness of their texture.—Staunton's notes.

proud of the Prince’s patronising presence, and, while often disputing with Falstaff, has no wish to lose him or any of the party as customers in her premises. The Prince hears all their quarrelling and joking with evident amusement, his presence always preventing any actual violence among them, which would otherwise have probably occurred.

“PRINCE HENRY. What didst thou lose, Jack?

FALSTAFF. Wilt thou believe me, Hal? three or four bonds of forty pounds apiece, and a seal of my grandfather’s.

PRINCE HENRY. A trifle, some eightpenny matter.

HOSTESS. So I told him, my lord; and I said I heard your grace say so: and, my lord, he speaks most vilely of you, like a foul-mouthed man as he is; and said he would cudgel you.

PRINCE HENRY. What! he did not?

HOSTESS. There’s neither faith, truth, nor womanhood in me else.

FALSTAFF. There’s no more faith in thee than in a stewed prune; nor no more truth in thee than in a drawn fox.”

The Prince never brings either a courtier or servant with him to this tavern, but mingles with these coarse, disreputable rogues, male and female, on strange terms of contemptuous familiarity. They probably deem themselves safe, at least during his life, from any severe legal penalty; while he prefers their coarse jests and habits to all the gaiety, pleasure, or dissipation of the Court. He tells Falstaff, before Mrs. Quickly, that he himself had searched his pockets, and found nothing but tavern reckonings, and having pacified and sent off the hostess, informs Sir John that he has got a military command for him in the ensuing campaign. Falstaff, though now an idle voluptuary, has been, and still is, a soldier. He enjoys

ease in time of peace, yet jests and cheers both himself and others in the present time of impending danger.

“FALSTAFF. Now, Hal, to the news at Court: for the robbery, lad—how is that answered?

PRINCE HENRY. O, my sweet beef, I must still be good angel to thee:—the money is paid back again.

FALSTAFF. I do not like that paying back, 'tis a double labour.

PRINCE HENRY. I am good friends with my father, and may do anything.

FALSTAFF. Rob me the exchequer, the first thing thou dost, and do it with unwashed hands too.¹

BARDOLPH. Do, my lord.

PRINCE HENRY. I have procured thee, Jack, a charge of foot.

FALSTAFF. I would it had been of horse. Where shall I find one that can steal well? O, for a fine thief, of two and twenty, or thereabouts!"

Prince Henry also presses Poins, Bardolph, and all his associates to enter the royal army, and they prepare to leave London for a campaign against the insurgents.

Act IV. introduces Hotspur, Worcester, and their Scottish ally, Douglas, in their camp near Shrewsbury. Letters are brought to Hotspur from his father, the crafty Northumberland, who is now ill, or feigns to be so, while fully approving his son's enterprise, and wishing all success to the rebellion. They do not, however, at present proclaim another King, but inveigh bitterly against Henry IV.'s ingratitude and hostility to those who had “helped him to the throne.” Shakespeare seems to follow history closely in these particulars, ascribing to King, royalists, and insurgents the ideas which their conduct revealed, though ex-

¹ Do it without repentance, without “that paying back.”—Staunton's notes.

pressed in his own grand language.¹ Hotspur, though loving his father, hears of his illness with impatience, if not incredulity, exclaiming:

“Hath he leisure to be sick now?”

while the plotting Worcester much regrets his brother's absence; but the fiery Douglas agrees with Hotspur in wishing to engage the foe at once.

Sir Richard Vernon, an ally and cousin of Hotspur's, now announces that part of the royal army approaches, commanded by Henry IV.'s younger son, Prince John of Lancaster, and the remainder, headed by the King and Prince of Wales, are following. He gives a fine martial description of the wild Prince, whom Hotspur mentions with natural contempt, as “the mad-cap prince,” but whom he now longs to engage in single combat.

“VERNON. I saw young Harry, with his beaver on,
His cuisses on his thighs, gallantly arm'd,
Rise from the ground like feather'd Mercury,

¹ “The obligations which Henry IV. had owed to Northumberland were of a kind the most likely to produce ingratitude on the one side and discontent on the other. The sovereign naturally became jealous of that power which had advanced him to the throne, and the subject was not easily satisfied in the returns which he thought so great a favour merited. The impatient spirit of Henry Percy, and the factious disposition of Worcester, younger brother of Northumberland, inflamed the discontents of that nobleman. He entered into a correspondence with Glendower. He made an alliance with the Earl of Douglas. He roused up all his partisans to arms, and such unlimited authority at that time belonged to the great families that the same men whom, a few years before, he had conducted against Richard II. now followed his standard against Henry.”—Hume's “History,” vol. ii.

And vaulted with such ease into his seat
 As if an angel dropp'd down from the clouds,
 To turn and wind a fiery Pegasus,
 And witch the world with noble horsemanship,
 HOTSPUR. No more, no more ; worse than the sun in
 March,
 This praise doth nourish argues. Let them come.
 I am on fire,
 To hear this rich reprisal is so nigh,
 And yet not ours :—Come, let me take my horse,
 Who is to bear me, like a thunderbolt,
 Against the bosom of the Prince of Wales :
 Harry to Harry shall, hot horse to horse,
 Meet, and ne'er part, till one drop down a corse.
 O that Glendower were come."

Neither Glendower, with his Welshmen, nor North-umberland have yet joined Hotspur, Worcester, and Douglas ; but these three leaders—one cautious and reluctant, the others bold and impetuous—resolve to risk a battle without their allies.

The next scene introduces Falstaff and Bardolph, the former styled a captain, now in marching order, with the royal army, Sir John having enlisted some miserable recruits, whom he describes and ridicules, first to himself, and then to Prince Henry, who, with Westmoreland, are surprised to see such followers.

"FALSTAFF. There's but a shirt and a half in all my company ; and the half shirt is two napkins tied together, and thrown over the shoulders like a herald's coat without sleeves ; and the shirt, to say the truth, stolen from my host at St. Alban's, or the red-nosed inn-keeper at Daventry : but that's all one ; they'll find linen enough on every hedge.

[Enter PRINCE HENRY and WESTMORELAND.]

PRINCE HENRY. Tell me, Jack ; what fellows are these that come after ?

FALSTAFF. Mine, Hal, mine.

PRINCE HENRY. I did never see such pitiful rascals.

FALSTAFF. Tut, tut ; good enough to toss : food for powder,

food for powder ; they'll fill a pit as well as better ; tush, man, mortal men, mortal men.”

Had any other officer enlisted them, he might have been severely reprimanded ; but Falstaff is evidently a standing joke with the Prince, and no one censures him, though Westmoreland expresses some discontent. Falstaff hears him with witty contempt, while Prince Henry, after jesting with his old favourite, announces that Hotspur is already in the field, which Falstaff hears without dismay, though certainly preferring his former times of peace in the Boar's Head Tavern.

After this fanciful comic scene, Shakespeare reverts to history, again describing Hotspur, Worcester, and Douglas in the camp at Shrewsbury, resolved to fight the royal forces immediately, when Sir Walter Blunt arrives as a messenger from the King, to ask the cause of their sudden rebellion, while acknowledging their previous services to his cause. Hotspur replies with angry complaints of Henry IV.'s ingratitude, in words which doubtless express his father's and uncle's feelings, as well as his own.

“HOTSPUR. The King is kind ; and, well we know, the King
Knows at what time to promise, when to pay.
My father, and my uncle, and myself,
Did give him that same royalty he wears :
And, when he was not six and twenty strong,
Sick in the world's regard, wretched and low,
A poor unmindful outlaw sneaking home,
My father gave him welcome to the shore.

In short time after, he depos'd the King ;

Soon after that, depriv'd him of his life ;
 And, in the neck of that, task'd¹ the whole state :
 To make that worse, suffer'd his kinsman March
 (Who is, if every owner were well plac'd,
 Indeed, his King) to be engag'd in Wales,
 There without ransom to be forfeited :
 Disgrac'd me in my happy victories ;
 Rated my uncle from the council-board ;
 In rage dismiss'd my father from the Court ;
 Broke oath on oath, committed wrong on wrong :
 And, in conclusion, drove us to seek out
 This head of safety ; and, withal to pry
 Into his title, the which we find
 Too indirect for long continuance."

Sir Walter Blunt returns to the royal camp, having heard this answer ; but Hotspur has not yet decided upon actual battle, and suggests an interview between the King and his uncle Worcester before an engagement. With this proposal Blunt returns to the King, and the next scene is in York, at Archbishop Scroop's palace. This prelate—brother to Lord Wiltshire, Richard II.'s adherent, who was executed, like Bushy and Green, by the new government—was the determined foe of Henry IV. Evidently a man of great resolution and energy, though, of course, no warrior, he actively co-operates with Northumberland and the other malcontents. How far his political conduct was approved by the Pope or the English clergy does not appear in history. He seems, however, to have been the only prelate who actually took the field against the reigning King, though others, like the Bishop of Carlisle, who had opposed Henry's usurpation in Richard's lifetime, probably wished him dethroned,

¹ Taxed.

and the house of Mortimer in his place. At present the Archbishop is merely corresponding with the other insurgent leaders, using all his influence on their behalf, though later he himself took the field, and was among the most resolute and determined of the King's foes.

Act V. describes the King, with the Princes Henry and John of Lancaster, and their officers, including Falstaff, at the royal camp, near Shrewsbury. It is here that Henry IV. receives Lord Worcester and Sir Richard Vernon, who come to discuss terms, and sternly reproaches Worcester for heading this rebellion against him.

“KING HENRY. How now, my Lord of Worcester? 'tis not well,
That you and I should meet upon such terms
As now we meet: You have deceiv'd our trust;
And made us doff our easy robes of peace,
To crush our old limbs in ungentle steel:
This is not well, my lord, this is not well.
What say you to it? will you again unknit
This churlish knot of all-abhorred war?
And move in that obedient orb again,
Where you did give a fair and natural light?

WORCESTER. It pleas'd your majesty to turn your looks
Of favour from myself, and all our house;
And yet I must remember you, my lord,
We were the first and dearest of your friends.
For you, my staff of office did I break
In Richard's time; and posted day and night,
To meet you in the way, and kiss your hand.

It was myself, my brother, and his son
That brought you home, and boldly did outdare
The danger of the time.”

Worcester, who was among the first to desert Richard and join Henry's standard, while his brother Northum-

berland headed the English nobility in placing him on the throne, is now before him, an avowed enemy, in armed rebellion against his authority. He therefore makes bitter complaints in reply to the King's reproach, though less vehement than those of his nephew Hotspur, about Henry's ingratitude to his family, and his arbitrary conduct generally. The offended King and the equally offended subject upbraid each other, when Prince Henry, addressing Worcester, sends his personal challenge to Hotspur, whom he longs to encounter in single fight. After this defiant message, the King dismisses Worcester, promising, however, free pardon, and even hope of favour, to all in arms, without exception, if they return to their allegiance.

Worcester and Vernon then return, and in the next scene the former declares that he will not tell his nephew Hotspur of the King's offer of peace, which he himself admits to be

“Liberal and kind.”

Vernon regrets his resolution, but Worcester, ever suspicious and crafty, fancies Henry will never really pardon his family, and that no peace with him is therefore desirable. He resolves to conceal the King's offer of terms from Hotspur, which, as Shakespeare represents, was a dishonourable act ; but it seems rather doubtful what Worcester's real conduct was on this important occasion.¹ He therefore invents a proud, insulting

¹ Mr. Staunton says that Henry IV. and Hotspur might have made peace, and avoided the battle, but that Worcester, who had an inter-

reply from the King, while Vernon reports the Prince's challenge to Hotspur, who, with the warlike Douglas, now longs for a battle. They then prepare for a resolute encounter; the royal forces attack them, and the contest rages for some time with desperate fury.¹ In reality, the brave Hotspur was slain “by an unknown hand,” but Shakespeare invents a personal encounter between him and Prince Henry, who slays him in presence of Falstaff.

He then describes a succession of single combats, in one of which the Prince puts Earl Douglas to flight, who had attacked the King. This seems a strange idea, for Douglas's bravery was owned by all, even by Shakespeare, who yet makes him fly from an encounter with the Prince of Wales. The Scottish Earl, however, soon reappears. He longs to slay the King, and has already killed some brave warriors who personate Henry IV. in the field, to ensure that monarch's safety, when he encounters Falstaff, who, falling down, feigns to be dead, thereby not only deceiving his foe,

view with the King at his nephew's request, “so misinterpreted the conversation between them” that war was inevitable (notes to the “Illustrated Shakespeare”). Worcester's duplicity in this case is not recorded by Hume, though it is not unlikely, under the circumstances, considering the mutual distrust between him and the King.

¹ “We shall scarcely find any battle in those ages where the shock was more terrible and more constant. Henry exposed his person in the thickest of the fight. His gallant son, Prince Henry, whose military achievements were afterwards so renowned, and who here performed his novitiate in arms, signallised himself on his father's footsteps. Percy [Hotspur] supported that fame which he had acquired in many a bloody combat. Earl Douglas performed feats of valour which are almost incredible. He seemed determined that the King of England should fall by his arm; he sought him all over the field of battle.”—Hume's “History,” vol. ii., chap. xviii.

who immediately leaves him, but also Prince Henry, who expresses real sorrow at seeing, as he thinks, the dead body of his amusing old companion.

“PRINCE HENRY. What ! old acquaintance ; could not all this flesh

Keep in a little life ? Poor Jack, farewell !
I could have better spared a better man.
Death hath not struck so fat a deer to-day,
Though many dearer, in this bloody fray :—
Embowell'd will I see thee by and by :
Till then, in blood by noble Percy lie.

[*Exit.*]

FALSTAFF (*rising slowly*). Embowell'd ! if thou bowel me to-day, I'll give you leave to powder me and eat me too to-morrow. 'Sblood, 'twas time to counterfeit, or that hot termagant Scot had paid me scot and lot too. Counterfeit ? I lie, I am no counterfeit : for he is but the counterfeit of a man who hath not the life of a man : but to counterfeit dying, when a man thereby liveth, is to be no counterfeit, but the true and perfect image of life indeed. The better part of valour is discretion ; in the which better part I have saved my life.”

Falstaff's comic wit on this occasion, and, indeed, all he says and does throughout, present a most comic, cheerful contrast to the tremendous events, as well as to the many heroic characters, amid which this witty old profligate is so strangely involved. No one resembles him at all ; he has apparently no relative, intimate friend, or connection of any kind. He is thus a puzzle to every one, patronised by Prince Henry, and wondered at by his own companions, but evidently not acquainted with the other young princes. When the Prince leaves him, Falstaff takes up the body of the gallant Hotspur, after stabbing it, to make sure that his noble burthen is really lifeless, and intends declaring himself his slayer, when the royal

brothers Henry and John of Lancaster meet him. Falstaff, alone before these young men, thinks he can say what he likes, and boldly declares that he has slain Hotspur, while Prince Henry steadily maintains that he himself has killed him.

“FALSTAFF. There is Percy : if your father will do me any honour, so ; if not, let him kill the next Percy himself. I look to be either earl or duke, I can assure you.

PRINCE HENRY. Why, Percy I killed myself, and saw thee dead.

FALSTAFF. Didst thou ?—Lord, Lord, how this world is given to lying !—I grant you I was down, and out of breath : and so was he : but we rose both at an instant, and fought a long hour by Shrewsbury clock.

PRINCE JOHN. This is the strangest tale that e'er I heard.

PRINCE HENRY. This is the strangest fellow, brother John.”

His grave, practical younger brother never laughs at Falstaff or his jokes. He resembles his politic father in caution, but, though equally brave, is his inferior both in shrewdness and knowledge of character. Prince Henry, never angry with Falstaff, hears his falsehoods with the utmost good humour, and departs with his brother, bidding Falstaff follow with Hotspur’s body.

The last scene describes Henry IV., with his sons Henry and John, surrounded by ministers and generals, while his captured foes, Worcester and Vernon, are brought before him. Earl Douglas was also captured and liberated, not being an English subject ; but the King has somehow discovered Worcester’s deceit in not conveying his offers of peace, and, after reproaching him for his conduct, sentences him and Vernon to execution. In sentencing them as rebels, the new

King, only made so himself by rebellion, has no wish to see his own successful example followed, and rather strangely exclaims, considering his present position and history :

“ Thus ever did rebellion find rebuke.”

Except these, no prisoners were executed, though Henry had many captives; and, considering the harsh laws and fierce spirit of the time, it is evident that the King was thought to have made a merciful use of his triumph.¹

The battle of Shrewsbury ends the first part of this play, but the rebellion or civil war is not yet over, though this crushing defeat has destroyed all hope of its success. The harassed King, who, alike before and after his accession to the throne, was beset with enemies and dangers, prepares resolutely to continue the struggle till all opposition is over. The Welsh chief Glendower, the Archbishop of York, Northumberland, and some other noblemen still defy his authority, though Glendower is the only man among them of much military genius or experience. Yet the wealth, high position, and craft of Northumberland, and the Archbishop's influence, rendered them rather formidable; while Glendower, in the Welsh mountains, though more inaccessible, was perhaps less likely to rouse other English subjects against the government. The King has now his sons to depend on, having lived to see his most zealous adherents become his mortal foes. Prince Henry, when once amid the excitement

¹ Hume's “ History.”

of warfare, assists his father to the utmost, and for a time seems a different man from the dissipated “sweet wag, Hal,” in the Boar’s Head Tavern; while Prince John, whose remarkable character is more developed in the second part of this divided play, firmly supports his family’s interests with the steady consistency of his resolute spirit.

In this play Hotspur is the chief hero. He appears in “Richard II.” as a spirited, promising youth. He is here, in early manhood, the pride of the English nation, as even the King admits, and the hope and glory of his distinguished family. Unfortunately for them, however, his impetuous spirit and eager appeals incline both his admiring father and uncle to follow his guidance in open rebellion, whereas those shrewd old statesmen, though angry with the King, might never have declared open war but for their fiery young relative, whose high courage and great popularity doubtless inspired them with reasonable hopes of success. It appears from both history and the play, however, that peace might have been made, and the Shrewsbury battle avoided, had not Worcester’s duplicity, or, rather, deep distrust of the King, made him doubtful, if not of pardon, at least of any future favour or benefit to himself and his family.¹ For

¹ “No house had played a greater part in the overthrow of Richard II., or had been more richly rewarded by the new King. But old grudges existed between the house of Percy and the house of Lancaster. Northumberland had been at bitter variance with John of Gaunt, and, though a common dread of Richard’s enmity had thrown the Percies and Henry together, the new King and his powerful subjects were soon parted again.”—Green’s “History of the English People,” chap. v.

Henry IV., despite his many great qualities, seems not to have possessed much power of conciliation. It was his fate, during an eventful career, to make mortal enemies of nearly all his most distinguished subjects. The end of "Richard II." left Henry rewarding the Percy family for defeating or executing Lords Salisbury, Spencer, and others, in his behalf; and the end of this play leaves him ordering the execution of his former adherents, Worcester and Vernon, after slaying their relative Hotspur, and also preparing for a final campaign against Northumberland and the Archbishop of York, now his implacable foes. In these proceedings, the dramatic description is supported in all chief events by historical record.¹ It does not seem, however, very clear, either in the play or in history, what new government these distinguished insurgents really wished to establish, though their desire to dethrone the King is sufficiently evident. The imprisoned young Earl of March and his uncle, Sir Edmund Mortimer, who remained with the chief Glendower, had prior claims to the crown, but neither seems to have been proclaimed King by the insurgents, nor was the formal deposition of Henry IV. publicly advocated or proposed.²

This civil war or rebellion apparently first arose

¹ Hume's "History."

² "Henry Percy [Hotspur] became the centre of a great conspiracy to place the Earl of March upon the throne. His father Northumberland and his uncle Worcester joined in the plot. Sir Edmund Mortimer negotiated for aid from Glendower. Earl Douglas threw in his fortunes with the confederates."—Green's "History of the English People," chap. v. Still there seems to have

chiefly from the great irritation and disappointment of the new King’s former adherents, who allied themselves with Glendower and Sir Edmund Mortimer, and, had they succeeded, would doubtless have deposed Henry, and crowned Mortimer or his nephew March, for which, indeed, they had the sanction of the late King Richard, who had named the latter his heir.¹ King Henry was now in middle age, supported by brave and loyal sons. He was far less dependent than before on either ambitious statesmen or warriors to secure the stability of his throne. The end of this play, therefore, leaves the sagacious King and his war-like sons in complete triumph—more united, indeed, during warfare than in peace, and though still opposed by some influential subjects, yet with every prospect of success before them.

been no actual proclamation of young March as King by the rebel leaders, though they doubtless intended to make him so.

¹ “Henry IV. detained Lord March in honourable custody at Windsor Castle, but he had reason to dread that, in proportion as that nobleman grew to man’s estate, he would draw to him the attachment of the people, and make them reflect on the fraud, violence, and injustice by which he had been excluded from the throne.”—Hume’s “History,” chap. xviii.

V—*continued*

"SECOND PART OF KING HENRY IV."

AT this exciting period in England, when there were no newspapers, it was indeed a time for rumours of all sorts to spread uncontradicted. Shakespeare therefore makes the spirit of Rumour appear before Northumberland's castle at Warkworth. This nobleman being more of a statesman than a soldier, excuses himself from taking the field, while carefully watching events. Rumour is here supposed to address a listening world :

"Open your ears, for which of you will stop
The vent of hearing, when loud Rumour speaks?
I, from the orient to the drooping west,
Making the wind my post-horse, still unfold
The acts commenced on this ball of earth,
Upon my tongues continual slanders ride,
The which in every language I pronounce,
Stuffing the ears of men with false reports.
I speak of peace, while covert enmity
Under the smile of safety wounds the world."

Contradictory news is brought Northumberland by his adherents, Morton and Travers, first of his son's victory, then of his defeat and death. The old Earl

is at first incredulous, but, when convinced of the fatal news, he utters almost frantic language of defiance against the King.

“MORTON. Douglas is living, and your brother, yet :
But, for my lord your son——

NORTHUMBERLAND. Why, he is dead.
See what a ready tongue suspicion hath !
He that but fears the thing he would not know,
Hath, by instinct, knowledge from others' eyes,
That what he fear'd is chanced. Yet speak, Morton ;
Tell thou thy Earl his divination lies.

MORTON. You are too great to be by me gainsaid :
Your spirit is too true, your fears too certain.

NORTHUMBERLAND. For this I shall have time enough to mourn,
In poison there is physic ; and these news,
Having been well, that would have made me sick,
Being sick, have in some measure made me well.
. . . . Hence, therefore, thou nice crutch ;
A scaly gauntlet now, with joints of steel,
Must glove this hand : and hence, thou sickly coif,
Thou art a guard too wanton for the head
Which princes, flesh'd with conquest, aim to hit.
Now bind my brows with iron : and approach
The ragged'st hour that time and spite dare bring,
To frown upon the enrag'd Northumberland !”

He is now placed in an extraordinary position, and, once Henry IV.’s chief adherent, has become his chief enemy. His son and brother are slain and captured by that monarch—the former killed in battle, the latter sentenced to perish on the scaffold, and he himself is almost sure to be exposed to either the one fate or the other. His personal hatred to the King, therefore, probably exceeds that of any other foe. But Northumberland is both old and careworn. His brave son was evidently the hope, as well as the pride

of his advanced age.¹ He at this moment alone represents the Percy family, now menaced with ruin and extirpation. He soon hears from Morton and Travers that his son's ally, the Archbishop, is in the field, striving to give the checked, yet not quelled, rebellion the character of a holy war.² Yet Henry, when known as Bolingbroke, was most popular, and apparently encouraged by the nation generally in his aspiration to the throne. His celebrated triumphal procession through London, leading Richard captive amid enthusiastic applause, together with his first unopposed triumph over the King's forces, proved that his accession was generally expected and desired. But Archbishop Scroop was evidently a man of high courage, and his hatred to Henry, owing to his brother Lord Wiltshire's execution, was more consistent, if less vehement, than the sudden animosity of Northumberland against that monarch. Shakespeare mentions, probably from some tradition, that this prelate had even shown Richard II.'s blood

¹ Hume states that Northumberland submitted to the King, and was pardoned, after Hotspur's death—which Shakespeare does not state—but that he again rose in rebellion, and joined the Archbishop of York and Lord Nottingham, who, “though they had remained quiet while Henry Percy was in the field, still hated the King, and determined, with Northumberland, to seek revenge against him” (chap. xviii.).

² Hume states that when the English people calmly reflected on the many illegal acts which attended Henry IV.'s accession, the deposition and suspected murder of Richard II., and the imprisonment of Lord March, the heir to the crown, “These enormities sanctified all the rebellions against him, and made the executions, though not remarkably severe, which he found necessary for the maintenance of his authority, appear cruel as well as iniquitous to the people” (chap. xviii.).

to the people to excite them all the more against his reigning foe. For Morton tells Northumberland :

“ The gentle Archbishop of York is up
With well-appointed powers ; he is a man
Who with a double surety binds his followers.

Turns insurrection to religion :
Suppos’d sincere and holy in his thoughts,
He is follow’d both with body and with mind ;
And doth enlarge his rising with the blood
Of fair King Richard, scrap’d from Pomfret stones.”

Northumberland, whose energy, pride, and anger, all of them thoroughly aroused, struggle against the depressing effects of age and grief, resolves to join the Archbishop in a last desperate attempt against the new King, whom he was the first to make such, yet to whom he now attributes the ruin of his family.

The next scene is in London, where Sir John Falstaff has returned, in evident high spirits, after his campaign, in which, if not very distinguished, he certainly suffered from no bodily injury or mental sorrow. He returns to town all the prouder, if not the richer, for he speaks of new satin for his cloak, though the tailor naturally tells his servant-lad that he must have better security than that of his roguish comrade Bardolph. While Falstaff is walking through the streets of London, and railing at this disobliging tailor, he is addressed by Chief Justice Gascoigne, who knows him well, and grieves at his influence over the Prince of Wales. This man was the celebrated judge who, on a former occasion, had

sent the wild Prince to prison for assaulting or threatening him when trying one of his riotous companions. This very short imprisonment of the heir apparent caused immense sensation at the time, and has been much noticed in subsequent history; yet, considering the Prince's lawless and even outrageous conduct, in robbing, or encouraging others to rob, his father's subjects, which was generally believed, and which had been continued so long with impunity, this penalty was, indeed, but very slight. Falstaff, though his wit and effrontery are invincible, is yet rather uneasy before the judge, who has both the right and the will, but not the power, to punish him, and who certainly does not appreciate his jokes. Sir John, therefore, tries to avoid him, but Gascoigne persists in reproving him—vainly, as he might have well known, except to gratify his own vexed spirit, by telling him the truth. He rightly accuses him of misleading the Prince—perhaps, in his mind, the most heinous of Falstaff's offences, as being the most dangerous to the future welfare of England; for doubtless he and all the chief lawyers, with other loyal subjects, viewed the heir apparent's present and probable future conduct with the utmost disgust and apprehension.

“CHIEF JUSTICE. Sir John, you live in great infamy.

FALSTAFF. He that buckles him in my belt cannot live in less.

CHIEF JUSTICE. Your means are very slender, and your waste is great.

FALSTAFF. I would it were otherwise: I would my means were greater and my waist slenderer.

CHIEF JUSTICE. You have misled the youthful Prince.

FALSTAFF. The youthful Prince hath misled me.

CHIEF JUSTICE. You follow the young Prince up and down, like his ill angel.

FALSTAFF. Not so, my lord; your ill angel is light; but, I hope, he that looks upon me will take me without weighing. . . . For the box o' the ear that the young Prince gave you, he gave it like a rude prince, and you took it like a sensible lord. I have checked him for it; and the young lion repents: marry, not in ashes and sackcloth, but in new silk and old sack.

CHIEF JUSTICE. Well, God send the Prince a better companion.

FALSTAFF. God send the companion a better Prince! I cannot rid my hands of him.”

The witty jests of Falstaff and his friends afford, indeed, no amusement to them, but only display the bold, insolent mockery of mischievous, unpunished rogues, who were becoming more and more dangerous to the peace of the community. Falstaff's wit, however, has amused generations of delighted Englishmen; even the moral Dr. Johnson is enthusiastic in admiration, yet, had he known Falstaff, or witnessed this scene between him and Gascoigne, besides many others in which Sir John distinguished himself, he would probably have viewed the dishonest, shameless old profligate with unmitigated aversion.¹ Falstaff's ready wit and constant effrontery, so

¹ “Falstaff, unimitated, inimitable Falstaff! how shall I describe thee? Thou compound of sense and vice—of sense which may be admired, but not esteemed; of vice which may be despised, but hardly detested. . . . He is stained with no enormous or sanguinary crimes, so that his licentiousness is not so offensive but that it may be borne with for his mirth.”—Johnson's “Notes to Henry IV.” Yet, had Johnson really known Falstaff personally, his “licentiousness,” shown in a life of dishonest profligacy, would have probably shocked the strict moralist far more than such “mirth” as his would have amused him.

amusing to hear in Shakespeare's language, would, in a living corruptor of youth and associate of rogues, have been most provoking. The Chief Justice dislikes, distrusts, and probably longs to punish him, but keeps his temper, which is sorely tried by the insolent banter of the shrewd old sinner. He tells Falstaff, however, that the King has "severed" him from the Prince for a time, ordering him to march against the insurgents with Prince John; while the King and his eldest son are to attack Glendower in Wales. This arrangement does not please Sir John, who would much prefer to be with Prince Henry than with his stern, grave younger brother; but he has no choice in the matter.

The next scene is at York, where Archbishop Scroop, with Lords Hastings and Mowbray, and other insurgent leaders, are discussing their plans. Since Hotspur's death, this prelate was the most resolute of all Henry IV.'s enemies, except Northumberland, whose age and misfortunes render his great energy less formidable. Scroop never forgot either his brother Lord Wiltshire's execution, or the death of the late King, to whom his family were devotedly attached. He again recalls the triumphal procession of Henry IV. through London, the humiliation of the unfortunate Richard on that day, which, perhaps, he witnessed, and imagines that the English are as dissatisfied with the new King as they were with his predecessor.

"ARCHBISHOP.
And publish the occasion of our arms.

Let us on;

The commonwealth is sick of their own choice.

They that when Richard liv'd, would have him die,
Are now become enamoured of his grave :
They that threw dust upon his goodly head,
When through proud London he came sighing on
After the admir'd heels of Bolingbroke,
Cry now, ‘O earth, yield up that King again,
And take thou this !’”

But in this idea he and the other insurgents were mistaken, for though the new King had indeed made many enemies among his more influential subjects, and lost much of his popularity, the public seem generally to have favoured and supported him during his whole career.¹

Act II. is again in London, where Falstaff's hostess, Mrs. Quickly, wants him arrested for his debt to her, before he leaves town for another campaign. She employs two constables—Fang and Snare—to seize him, but Falstaff, with Bardolph, draw their swords, and a scuffle is beginning, when Gascoigne appears, orders all to keep the peace, and inquires about the dispute. Mrs. Quickly eagerly assures him that Falstaff has not only

“Eat her out of house and home,”

and owes her money, but has also promised to marry her.

¹ “After a few years, the government of Henry IV. became extremely unpopular. Perhaps his dissension with the great Percy family, which had placed him on the throne, and was regarded with partiality by the people, chiefly contributed to this alteration of their attachment.”—Hallam's “Middle Ages,” chap. viii.

"CHIEF JUSTICE. Are you not ashamed to enforce a poor widow to so rough a course to come by her own ?

FALSTAFF. What is the gross sum that I owe thee ?

HOSTESS. Marry, if thou wert an honest man, thyself and the money too. Thou didst swear to me upon a parcel-gilt goblet, sitting in my Dolphin-chamber, at the round table, by a sea-coal fire, upon Wednesday in Whitsun-week, when the Prince broke thy head for liking his father to a singing-man at Windsor ; thou didst swear to me then, as I was washing thy wound, to marry me, and make me my lady thy wife. Canst thou deny it ? Did not goodwife Keech, the butcher's wife, come in then, and call me gossip Quickly ? And didst thou not, when she was gone downstairs, desire me to be no more so familiar with such poor people ; saying that ere long they should call me madam ? And didst thou not kiss me, and bid me fetch thee thirty shillings ? I put thee now to thy book-oath : deny it, if thou canst.

FALSTAFF. My lord, this is a poor mad soul : and she says, up and down the town, that her eldest son is like you : she hath been in good case, and, the truth is, poverty hath distracted her."

Gascoigne, who abhors Falstaff, befriends this woman, perhaps more than she deserves, as Sir John perceives, and calls her aside, while a messenger from the Court to the judge diverts his thoughts from the worthy couple for a short time. Falstaff succeeds in coaxing and pacifying Mrs. Quickly ; sending his comrade Bardolph away with her, promising to sup at her tavern, and there meet a certain Doll Tearsheet. This woman is a young ally of the hostess, and Falstaff's favourite ; for, while he is intimate with the Prince, and induces him to visit her house, Mrs. Quickly tries to make it as pleasant as she can for the old profligate, though often quarrelling with him, through fear of losing money by his wasteful extravagance.

The next scene is in one of the London streets, where Prince Henry and Poins, his most constant

associate, except Falstaff, are together. They discuss the news of the King's illness, which evidently gratifies Poins, but not the Prince, who, while allowing this worthless fellow to be familiar, in reality neither trusts him nor any of his comrades.

“PRINCE HENRY. But I tell thee, my heart bleeds inwardly, that my father is so sick: and keeping such vile company as thou art, hath in reason taken from me all ostentation of sorrow.

POINS. The reason?

PRINCE HENRY. What wouldest thou think of me if I should weep?

POINS. I would think thee a most princely hypocrite.

PRINCE HENRY. It would be every man's thought.”

Falstaff's servant-lad, a sharp-witted little fellow, not improved by his new master, now brings the Prince a note from him, which the latter, after reading, shows to Poins. In this epistle, Falstaff, perhaps half in joke, declares that Poins wishes the Prince to marry his sister, and warns him against that worthy. Poins is enraged, while the Prince is amused. They both ask if Falstaff sups that night in Eastcheap, and hearing that he will do so, also that Mrs. Quickly and Doll will be with him, they resolve to go in disguise to the same place, and have another wild, dissipated revel there.

“PRINCE HENRY. Where sups he? doth the old boar feed at the old frank?

BARDOLPH. At the old place, my lord; in Eastcheap.

PRINCE HENRY. Sup any women with him?

PAGE. None, my lord, but Mistress Quickly and Mistress Doll Tearsheet.

PRINCE HENRY. What pagan may that be?

PAGE. A proper gentlewoman, sir, and a kinswoman of my master's.

PRINCE HENRY. Shall we steal upon them, Ned, at supper?

POINS. I am your shadow, my lord: I'll follow you.

PRINCE HENRY. Sirrah, you boy—and Bardolph;—no word to your master that I am yet come to town: There's for your silence.

BARDOLPH. I have no tongue, sir.

And the page equally if not more knowing replies:

And for mine, sir—I will govern it.

PRINCE HENRY. Fare ye well: go. [*Exeunt BARDOLPH and PAGE.*] How might we see Falstaff bestow himself to-night in his true colours, and not ourselves be seen?

POINS. Put on two leather jerkins and aprons, and wait upon him at his table as drawers.

PRINCE HENRY. From a prince to a prentice? a low transformation! that shall be mine: for, in everything, the purpose must weigh with the folly. Follow me, Ned."

The next scene reverts to Warkworth Castle, where the heart-broken Northumberland, with his wife and daughter-in-law, Hotspur's widow, are lamenting over their own condition as well as that of England. At this time, perhaps Northumberland, of all his fellow-countrymen, has most reason to be in profound grief and dejection. During the last years of the late reign, and for a short time after Henry's accession, this restless, energetic nobleman's ambition had not only irritated but actually hastened the ruin of the King he had helped to depose, while it had offended and alienated the new monarch whom he was the first to acknowledge. Richard II.'s adherents well remembered his vehement hostility to that unfortunate sovereign on behalf of the Prince who, having slain his son and brother, now contemplates his own death or exile. The old Earl's high spirit and family pride

still animate him, despite alike his age and his grief, for he longs to join the Archbishop and the remaining insurgents, but is persuaded by his wife and Lady Percy—who dread losing their remaining male relative—to “fly to Scotland” for the present, and there await events. They doubtless know that a statesman of his advanced age would be of no service on the battlefield, while his mental distress would, for the present at least, render him of little use in counsel. He at last follows their advice, and escapes from England as a fugitive from the wrath of that King for aiding whose accession so zealously he had incurred a “world of curses,” as his brave son Hotspur truly told him. Hume and Shakespeare in their accounts of Northumberland’s career agree on the whole; but the historian (chap. xviii.) states that he was pardoned after the battle of Shrewsbury, and fled to Scotland on the capture of Archbishop Scroop, but subsequently heading another rebellion, was slain in battle. His sudden yet implacable hatred to Henry IV. is thus historically proved, confirming Richard II.’s prediction that these his two chief enemies would turn against each other that fierce energy they both possessed, and which, in rebellious alliance, had easily effected his own destruction.¹

Northumberland, though again mentioned, never reappears in the play. His triumph in the last

¹ Hallam states (“Middle Ages,” chap. viii.) that the House of Commons thanked the King for pardoning Northumberland; but, on the other hand, it is evident that this ambitious old adherent never forgave his offended, but, as he thought, most ungrateful sovereign.

days of the late King had been apparently as complete as the most ambitious English rebel could desire. The last act of "Richard II.," which in this instance strictly follows history, leaves him praised, rewarded, and exultant by the throne of the new King, alike his first adherent and most honoured subject. The play of "Henry IV.," equally true to history, describes him moody, disappointed, and finally incited by his bold son to open rebellion. And now, in the "Second Part of Henry IV.," Shakespeare, still relying on history, describes him escaping for his life to Scotland, mourning for his son and brother, both slain, the one in battle, the other on the scaffold, by his enraged sovereign. Yet the King's anger was not more deep or implacable than his own against Henry, and thus their mutual hatred and disappointment—as the King's triumph never made him a happy man—fully verified the prophecy of their luckless victim, Richard II.¹

The next scene is in the Boar's Head, where Mrs. Quickly and Doll receive Falstaff, and spend what they think a pleasant evening. The hostess apparently knows that her own charms, whatever they once were, have lost their attractions ; for, though formerly wooed by Falstaff, as she declares, she now much prefers his money to his love, and is content to see her young friend Doll inherit all

¹ "Although Henry IV. was a great King, and the founder of a dynasty, the labour and sorrow of his task was ever more present to his mind than the solid success which his son was to inherit."—Stubbs's "Constitutional History of England."

the endearments of which she was once the alleged recipient. Doll, however, has another admirer in a certain swaggering bravo called Pistol, who follows her to the tavern, where he is alike unwelcome to the hostess, Falstaff, and Doll. Bardolph and the page, who both obey Falstaff, probably owing to his supposed influence with the Prince, enter the tavern with Pistol, but the latter soon finds himself terribly out of favour with Doll, who angrily scolds him for following her, and a violent quarrel ensues among this excellent company. Pistol is now quite confounded, Doll utterly scorning him, and fondling old Falstaff, to the delight of Mrs. Quickly, Bardolph, and the page.

“DOLL. For God’s sake, thrust him downstairs ; I cannot endure such a fustian rascal.

FALSTAFF. Quoit him down, Bardolph, like a shovel-groat shilling : nay, an he do nothing but speak nothing, he shall be nothing here.

BARDOLPH. Come, get you downstairs.

PISTOL. What ! shall we have incision ? shall we imbrue. [Snatching up his sword.]

HOSTESS. Here’s goodly stuff indeed !

FALSTAFF. Give me my rapier, boy.

DOLL. I prithee, Jack, I prithee, do not draw.

FALSTAFF. Get you downstairs. [Drawing.]

HOSTESS. Here’s a goodly tumult ! I’ll forswear keeping house, afore I’ll be in these tirrits and frights. So ; murder, I warrant now. Alas, alas ! put up your naked weapons, put up your naked weapons.

[*Exeunt PISTOL, BARDOLPH, and PAGE.*]

DOLL. I prithee, Jack, be quiet ; the rascal is gone.

HOSTESS. Are you not hurt i’ the groin ? methought he made a shrewd thrust at your belly.

Re-enter BARDOLPH.

FALSTAFF. Have you turned him out of doors ?

BARDOLPH. Yes, sir. The rascal’s drunk : you have hurt him, sir, in the shoulder.

FALSTAFF. A rascal ! to brave me !
 DOLL. Ah, you sweet little rogue, you !”

Pistol is thus expelled the premises by general consent, while the rest of the party enjoy themselves as usual, drinking and jesting, when Prince Henry and Poins enter, disguised as drawers or waiters. They hear Falstaff describe them both to the inquisitive Doll with tolerable accuracy.

“DOLL. Sirrah, what humour is the Prince of ?

FALSTAFF. A good shallow young fellow : he would have made a good pantler, he would have chipped bread well.

DOLL. They say Poins hath a good wit.

FALSTAFF. He a good wit? hang him, baboon ! his wit is as thick as Tewksbury mustard ; there is no more conceit in him than in a mallet.

DOLL. Why doth the Prince love him so, then ?

FALSTAFF. Because their legs are both of a bigness : and he plays at quoits well ; and eats conger and fennel ; and jumps upon joint-stools ; and swears with a good grace ; and wears his boots very smooth, like unto the skin of the leg ; and breeds no bate with telling of discreet stories ; and such other gambol faculties he hath, that show a weak mind and an able body, for which the Prince admits him : for the Prince himself is such another ; the weight of a hair will turn the scales between their avoirdupois.

PRINCE HENRY. Would not this nave of a wheel have his ears cut off ?”

and Poins cheerfully suggests a pleasing penalty :

“Let’s beat him.”

When Henry reveals himself, to the general surprise, Doll, perhaps with a vague hope of pleasing the Prince, or fearing he is offended, turns sharply on Falstaff, exclaiming :

“You fat fool, I scorn you,”

while Henry and Poins question, scold, and ridicule Falstaff, who ably defends himself with his usual ready wit.

“PRINCE HENRY. How vilely did you speak of me even now, before this honest, virtuous, civil gentlewoman !

HOSTESS. God’s blessing of your good heart ! and so she is, by my troth.

FALSTAFF. Didst thou hear me ?

PRINCE HENRY. Yes ; and you knew me, as you did when you ran away by Gadshill : you knew I was at your back ; and spoke it on purpose, to try my patience.

FALSTAFF. No, no, no, not so ; I did not think thou wast within hearing.

PRINCE HENRY. I shall drive you then to confess the wilful abuse ; and then I know how to handle you.

FALSTAFF. No abuse, Hal, on mine honour ; no abuse.

PRINCE HENRY. Not ! to dispraise me ; and call me “pantler,” and “bread-chipper,” and I know not what ?

FALSTAFF. No abuse, Hal.

POINS. No abuse !

FALSTAFF. No abuse, Ned, in the world ; honest Ned, none. I dispraised him before the wicked, that the wicked might not fall in love with him :—in which doing I have done the part of a careful friend, and a true subject, and thy father is to give me thanks for it. No abuse, Hal ;—none, Ned, none ! no, boys, none.”

He has pacified the Prince, who, perhaps, was never really angry with him, when Peto arrives, with news from the Court. Prince Henry and Falstaff are required to march against the remaining insurgents, and the former leaves the tavern immediately. Doll then reluctantly parts from Falstaff, who promises to see her again, to the delight of Mrs. Quickly, who wishes to increase this intimacy, hoping that they, with the Prince, may be frequent guests at her house. Apparently Prince Henry’s presence and patronage chiefly maintain this strange

establishment, for his previous short imprisonment by Judge Gascoigne has hitherto produced no permanent effect on the royal scapegrace, who, never considering the mischievous example he sets to all the youth of England, frequents the Boar's Head Tavern with Falstaff whenever he can spare time from his military duties, in which, however, he always delighted. No courtier, friend, or relative accompanies him to this place from first to last. He associates alone with low, profligate companions, male and female, utterly despising his anxious father's remonstrances, who, having overcome all his most dangerous foes, now finds himself practically and constantly disobeyed by his eldest son and lawful successor.

Act III. represents the invalid King, sleepless and care-worn, perhaps, in his weak state, exaggerating the diminished dangers which still threaten him. He summons his new counsellors, Lords Surrey and Warwick, to read some despatches, and, before they come, utters a thoughtful, sad soliloquy about his own agitated mind and the comparative happiness and peace of his subjects.

“ KING HENRY. How many of my poorest subjects
Are at this hour asleep ! O sleep, O gentle sleep,
Nature’s soft nurse, how have I frightened thee,
That thou no more wilt weigh my eyelids down,
And steep my senses in forgetfulness ?
Why rather sleep, liest thou in smoky cribs,
Upon uneasy pallets stretching thee,
And hush’d with buzzing night-flies to thy slumber,
Than in the perfum’d chambers of the great,
Under the canopies of costly state,

And lull'd with sounds of sweetest melody?
O, thou dull god; why liest thou with the vile
In loathsome beds, and leav'st the kingly couch
A watch case, or a common 'larum bell?
Wilt thou upon the high and giddy mast
Seal up the ship-boy's eyes, and rock his brains
In cradle of the rude imperious surge,
And in the visitation of the winds,
Who take the ruffian billows by the top,
Curling their monstrous heads, and hanging them
With deaf'ning clamours in the slippery clouds,
That, with the hurly, death itself awakes?
Canst thou, O partial sleep! give thy repose
To the wet sea-boy in an hour so rude,
And in the calmest and most stillest night,
With all appliances and means to boot,
Deny it to a king? Then happy low, lie down!
Uneasy lies the head that wears a crown!

Henry though the reverse of a timid or nervous man, usually showed a very thoughtful disposition, often recalling the past; and his serious mind, when not engaged in matters of war or politics, inclines more to melancholy reflection than to pleasure, triumph, or self-congratulation.¹

When his ministers come, they rather cheer him about the news, for they know that, since the Shrewsbury defeat, the insurgents have lost all chance of success, and that Northumberland, as Warwick sarcastically observes—

“Will soon be cooled”—

meaning by death or captivity. This allusion to his

¹ “The inquietude with which Henry IV. possessed his envied greatness, and the remorses with which it was said he was continually haunted, render him an object of our pity, even when seated upon the throne.”—Hume’s “History,” chap. xviii.

former most zealous adherent affects the weak King deeply. He instantly recalls the memorable day when Richard II.,

“Checked and rated by Northumberland,”

had prophesied that his insulting, powerful subject would become an equally dangerous rebel to his triumphant foe.

“KING HENRY. [O God, ! that one might read the book of fate,
And see the revolution of the times.]

The happiest youth, viewing his progress through,
What perils past, what crosses to ensue,
Would shut the book, and sit him down and die.
'Tis not ten years gone,
Since Richard and Northumberland, great friends,
Did feast together, and, in two years after,
Were they at wars : it is but eight years since
This Percy was the man nearest my soul ;
Who like a brother toil'd at my affairs,
And laid his love and life under my foot ;
Yea, for my sake, even to the eyes of Richard,
Gave him defiance. But which of you was by,

When Richard,—with his eye brimful of tears
Then check'd and rated by Northumberland,—
Did speak these words, now prov'd a prophecy ?
'Northumberland, thou ladder, by the which
My cousin Bolingbroke ascends my throne ;'

'The time shall come,' thus did he follow it,
'The time will come, that foul sin, gathering head,
Shall break into corruption ;'—so went on
Foretelling this same time's condition,
And the division of our amity.”

Had Henry been in his usual health, he might, when mentioning Northumberland, have severely blamed him before his ministers, and justified his own conduct

towards him. But now he names him without the least anger, his oppressed mind recalling the past with more interest and animation than he apparently feels about the present. He mentions, however, though evidently with surprise, a report that fifty thousand insurgents are under Northumberland and Scroop, whom he erroneously thinks are together; but Warwick contradicts the rumour, knowing that the foe is not so numerous, and has no longer a chance against the King's forces. He also reports the death of the brave Welsh chief Glendower, the last military leader among the malcontents who possessed any ability. Henry is too weak, or too sad, to make any reply, except that he will follow Warwick's counsel, and postpone his journey to the Holy Land. This project he seems to have steadily entertained since the death of Richard II., but the many troubles of his reign, and perhaps the opposition of his ministers, always prevented its accomplishment.

The next scene Shakespeare lays in Gloucestershire, at the house of a certain Justice Shallow, who, as his name indicates, is a silly, talkative boaster. Another magistrate, Justice Silence, is with him, likewise described by his name, being a silent and also a dull personage, but a patient listener to his chattering friend. They now await Sir John Falstaff, and have chosen some luckless peasants as recruits for him, the fat old knight being again in the field against the King's enemies. When joined by Falstaff and Bardolph, the two country justices call some of these recruits before them. They are five in

number—Mouldy, Shadow, Bull-calf, Wart, and Feeble. Shallow, after exhibiting them in turn to Falstaff, who is quite satisfied with them, amuses himself, but rather bores Sir John, by remembering or inventing several incidents when they were both young men and well acquainted, though probably they were never very intimate. When the recruits are left alone with Bardolph, Mouldy and Bull-calf try to bribe him to get them excused from military service. On Falstaff's return with the justices, Bardolph secretly tells him of the bribe, which he at once accepts, and frees the two men. Shallow is surprised at the best of the five recruits being rejected, knowing nothing of the bribe, but Sir John has no trouble in deceiving him.

“SHALLOW. Sir John, Sir John, do not yourself such wrong ; they are thy likeliest men, and I would have you served with the best.

FALSTAFF. Will you tell me, Master Shallow, how to choose a man ? Care I for the limb, the thews, the stature, bulk, and big assemblance of a man ! Give me the spirit, Master Shallow.—Here's Wart :—you see what a ragged appearance it is : he shall charge you, and discharge you, with the motion of a pewterer's hammer. And this same half-faced fellow, Shadow—give me this man ; he presents no mark to the enemy ; the foeman may with as great aim level at the edge of a penknife : And, for a retreat—how swiftly will this Feeble, the woman's tailor, run off ? O, give me the spare men, and spare me the great ones.”

Shallow and Falstaff are apparently about the same age, and form most amusing contrasts, but the gay old London libertine finds the chattering, silly country justice a tiresome companion, and probably wishes himself again in the Boar's Head Tavern, amid more

congenial society. It is difficult to understand how two such utter simpletons as Shallow and Silence could have administered justice, or exercised any authority, without getting themselves as well as others into constant trouble. They are even far inferior to many of their successors some two centuries later, whom Lord Macaulay, perhaps too unfavourably, describes.¹

Shallow, who probably knows of Falstaff's intimacy with the Prince, hopes he may some day go to Court with his witty old acquaintance, and Sir John makes a civil reply, but in reality has no wish to see him in London or anywhere else.

“FALSTAFF. Fare you well, gentle gentlemen. [*Exeunt SHALLOW and SILENCE.*] Lord, Lord, how subject we old men are to this vice of lying! This same starved justice hath done nothing but prate to me of the wildness of his youth, and the feats he hath done about Turnbull Street; and every third word a lie, duer paid to the hearer than the Turk's tribute. I do remember him at Clement's Inn, like a man made after supper of a cheese paring: when he was naked, he was, for all the world, like a forked radish, with a head fantastically carved upon it with a knife. And now become a squire and talks as familiarly of John of Gaunt, as if he had been sworn brother to him, and I'll be sworn he never saw him, but once in the tilt yard, and then he burst² his head, for crowding among the marshal's men.

The shrewd knight, however, seldom offends people if he can help it, so, despite his licentiousness and

¹ Macaulay, when describing an English country squire of the seventeenth century, says:—“He was a magistrate, and as such administered gratuitously to those who dwelt around him a rude, patriarchal justice, which, in spite of innumerable blunders, and of occasional acts of tyranny, was yet better than no justice at all” (“History of England,” vol. i.).

² “Broke.”—Staunton's notes.

constant falsehoods, he has scarcely an enemy except Chief Justice Gascoigne, who has both public and private reasons for dreading his future influence with the Prince.

The fourth act introduces Archbishop Scroop, Lord Mowbray, and other insurgent leaders. Mowbray is son and heir to King Henry's old enemy, the Duke of Norfolk, whom he had challenged in presence of Richard II. Both the prelate and he are much disappointed at hearing from their former ally Northumberland, in Scotland, that he cannot join them, though cordially wishing their complete success. While they are depressed at this news, Lord Westmoreland comes from the King's forces, now commanded by Prince John, to remonstrate with them—Scroop especially—for exciting insurrection. The prelate defends his conduct, and he and Westmoreland argue for some time together, when Mowbray, apparently a bold, hot-headed young man, angrily answers Westmoreland, who reminds him that Henry IV. had restored to him all his late father's confiscated rights and property. Mowbray, however, expresses no gratitude for this restitution, declaring it was originally the King's doing, when known as Bolingbroke, that his father had been despoiled and banished. He rashly believes, or pretends to believe, that had his father been allowed to fight Bolingbroke, he would certainly have slain him, and thus saved England from his usurpation.

“MOWBRAY. What thing, in honour, had my father lost,
That need to be reviv'd and breathed in me ?

The King, that lov'd him, as the state stood then,
Was force perforce compell'd to banish him :
And then, that Harry Bolingbroke, and he,
Being mounted, and both roused in their seats,
Their neighing coursers daring of the spur,
Their armed staves in charge, their beavers down,
Their eyes of fire sparkling through sights of steel,
And the loud trumpet blowing them together ;
Then, then, when there was nothing could have staid
My father from the breast of Bolingbroke—
O, when the King did throw his warder down
(His own life hung upon the staff he threw),
Then threw he down himself ; and all their lives,
That, by indictment, and by dint of sword,
Have since miscarried under Bolingbroke.”

To this spirited speech Westmoreland truly replies that Bolingbroke, or Hereford, as he was then often called, was well known as “a most valiant gentleman,” and quite as likely to have slain Norfolk. Mowbray, however, continues obstinate and defiant ; but Scroop and Lord Hastings, probably men of better judgment, are more anxious for peace, and, giving Westmoreland a list of their alleged grievances, declare that, if these are redressed, they will lay down their arms. Westmoreland returns to Prince John with their statements, and soon after the Prince has a conference with them. This fierce boy, though so young, already shows not only a steady courage, firmness, and gravity, but also a deep dissimulation far beyond his years. He civilly enough greets both the Archbishop and Mowbray, but gravely reproves the former for heading the insurgents with almost the dignity of a superior prelate.

“PRINCE JOHN. My lord of York, it better show'd with you,
When that your flock, assembled by the bell,
Encircled you, to hear with reverence

Your exposition on the holy text,
 Than now to see you here an iron man,
 Cheering a rout of rebels with your drum,
 Turning the word to sword, and life to death.

. You have taken up,
 Under the counterfeited seal of God,
 The subjects of His substitute, my father ;
 And, both against the peace of heaven and him,
 Have here up-swarmed them."

The Archbishop defends his conduct, while Mowbray and Hastings use bolder language, and John, after examining their proposals, declares he approves of them all, and will do what he can to have the alleged grievances redressed, provided that the rebel leaders discharge their followers and surrender their arms. Scroop and Hastings gladly consent, while Mowbray is unwilling, but overruled. The insurgents then disarm and disband, when immediately their leaders are arrested by the treacherous Prince, and sentenced to execution.¹

The Archbishop and Mowbray vainly remonstrate with the relentless youth, who, after scornfully ridiculing them, both for their rebellion and their credulity, orders them to be beheaded.

"MOWBRAY. Is this proceeding just and honourable ?

ARCHBISHOP. Will you thus break your faith ?

PRINCE JOHN. I pawn'd thee none.

I promised you redress of these same grievances
 Whereof you did complain ; which, by mine honour,

¹ "Holinshed's account of the insurrection does not, perhaps, directly implicate Prince John in this unparalleled breach of faith and honour ; but it cannot be forgotten that the Earl Westmoreland [who presided at the executions] was acting under the orders of his general" [Prince John].—Staunton's comments on "Henry IV."

I will perform with a most Christian care.
But for you, rebels, look to taste the due
Meet for rebellion, and such acts as yours.”

In reality the Archbishop's execution was so generally condemned that even Judge Gascoigne, despite his loyalty to the King, refused to sentence him; but another judge, more compliant, was found, who passed the fatal sentence without any previous indictment or trial.¹

Although Gascoigne, in common doubtless with other learned and influential men, disapproved of Scroop's execution, his fate did not apparently elicit either the express censure or remonstrance of the Pope. Probably, when a churchman abandoned his religious duties, and took the field as an armed rebel, or heading other armed rebels against an acknowledged king, he thereby forfeited the protection, if not the sympathy, of his spiritual chief and fellow-ecclesiastics. The Archbishop, besides, had not joined this rebellion for any religious object. The execution of his brother, Lord Wiltshire, by Henry IV. was the chief cause of his desperate animosity towards him; for the King, like most prudent or conscientious sovereigns, was always careful to be on good terms with the clergy.²

¹ “This was the first instance in England of a capital punishment inflicted on a bishop, whence the clergy of that rank might learn that their crimes were not, more than those of laics, to pass with impunity.”—Hume's “History,” chap. xviii.

² “Throughout Henry IV.'s career he is consistently devout, pure in life, temperate, and careful to avoid offence; faithful to the church and clergy.”—Stubbs's “Constitutional History,” vol. ii.

Scroop's fate, therefore, though doubtless condemned and lamented by many, yet excited less apparent pity or indignation than might have been expected.

Prince John, after ordering this prelate's execution, and those of Mowbray and Hastings, meets Falstaff, who has just captured a brave rebel leader—Sir John Colevile—without any trouble; for this unlucky gentleman, knowing that all his fellow-insurgents are dispersed and disarmed, naturally despairs of further resistance. John reproaches, or rather scolds Falstaff, with the stern sharpness of his character, which is peculiarly disconcerting to the old knight, accustomed to such different language from the Prince's wild, merry elder brother. Before this grave, determined boy, Falstaff is utterly confounded. He can neither defy, flatter, nor amuse him, and almost, for the first time in the play, seems at a loss what to say or how to answer.

“PRINCE JOHN. Now, Falstaff, where have you been all this while?

When everything is ended then you come:
These tardy tricks of yours will, on my life,
One time or other break some gallows' back.

FALSTAFF. I would be sorry, my lord, but it should be thus; I never knew yet but rebuke and check was the reward of valour. Do you think me a swallow, an arrow, or a bullet? have I, in my poor and old motion, the expedition of thought? I have speeded hither with the very extremist inch of possibility: and here, travel-tainted as I am, have, in my pure and immaculate valour, taken Sir John Colevile of the dale, a most furious knight and valorous enemy: But what of that? he saw me, and yielded; that I may say, with the hook-nosed fellow of Rome [Julius Cæsar], I came, saw, and overcame.”

Prince John, without the least merriment, coldly replies, utterly unmoved by the wit of Falstaff:

“It was more of his courtesy than your deserving.”

This relentless youth then orders the luckless Colevile's execution, and, being rejoined by Westmoreland, one of the King's new and chief adherents, bids a cold farewell to Falstaff, whom he perhaps wishes to punish, but has not the power to do so. He probably dislikes Sir John all the more for being his elder brother's evil genius and disreputable associate in London, which he well knows has caused such grief to his father, to whom he is enthusiastically and steadily dutiful. Falstaff, though he would gladly please him if he could, is far more discomfited by this stern boy than by the dignified Chief Justice Gascoigne. He slyly ridicules the latter under a show of respect, but before young John of Lancaster all his wit and effrontery alike fail him. For the artful old man, though shrewd and shameless as ever, is both checked and puzzled by this grave youth, and perhaps seldom, if ever, felt so disconcerted by any one or at any time before.

“FALSTAFF. My lord, I beseech you, give me leave to go
Through Gloucestershire: and when you come to Court,
Stand my good lord, pray, in your good report.

PRINCE JOHN. Fare you well, Falstaff: I, in my condition,
Shall better speak of you than you deserve. [Exit.

FALSTAFF. I would you had but the wit: 'twere better than your dukedom.—Good faith, this same young sober-blooded boy doth not love me: nor a man cannot make him laugh; but that's no marvel, he drinks no wine. There's never any of these demure boys come to any proof.”

The next scene is in London, where the invalid King, constantly fretting about his wild heir apparent, yet blames his other son, Thomas of Clarence, for not being more with Prince Henry, which probably young Clarence could scarcely have been, without associating with the inmates of the Boar's Head. The King hears with grief that his elder son is still in some part of London, with Poins and other wild companions; for directly the campaign was over, and the monarch and his son were relieved of military duties, the former fell ill, and the latter again returned to his dissipated way of life, despite his previous promises and even signs of amendment. While the invalid sovereign is still grieving about his troublesome son, news is brought him of the final defeat of the last opponents to his authority. These were the old Lord Northumberland and Lord Bardolph, who, even after Scroop's execution, had left Scotland, and made a desperate attempt at insurrection in the north of England.¹

In this engagement Northumberland was slain, but his death is not told to the King. Perhaps his ministers fear lest his feelings of triumph might be mingled with sadder emotions at hearing of the death, while in open rebellion, of his first zealous adherent. Henry is too weak to express exultation

¹ "It was the effect either of Henry's vigilance or good fortune, or of the narrow genius of his enemies, that no proper concert was ever formed among them. They rose in rebellion one after another, and thereby afforded him an opportunity of suppressing these insurrections, which, had they been united, might have proved fatal to his authority."—Hume's "History," chap. xviii.

or even relief at the news of this victory, but it evidently agitates him, and he swoons. When he partially recovers, he is placed on a bed by his sorrowing younger son and the courtiers, and left alone, when Prince Henry enters the chamber as the others leave it, and sees the King lying insensible on the bed, the crown being on his pillow, placed there by his own express order. For the ensuing, most affecting scene, there may have been some historical foundation. It was well known that the King, especially during his last illness, often reproached the Prince for his wild conduct, and deplored the probable future state of England under his rule. These remonstrances, so long practically unheeded, at last prevailed, though no amendment was shown by young Henry till after his father's death, when he appeared a changed man. Shakespeare describes Prince Henry seated by his father's bedside, and addressing the insensible crown, wishing, indeed, to wear it as King, and longing, with the eagerness of his ardent nature, to accept all the cares, duties, and troubles of his future position, together with its attractions, pleasures, and glories. While exciting his mind with these thoughts, he really imagines that his unconscious father is dead; for the King neither moves nor apparently breathes, and his look, while in sickly sleep or trance, has the appearance of death. The Prince, after vainly trying to rouse or wake him, places the coveted crown upon his own head, and leaves the room with it. His father awaking, first misses the crown, upon which his thoughts are

also constantly dwelling, especially in his last illness. He calls his attendants, who tell him they left Prince Henry alone with him while he was asleep. He immediately suspects the truth, that the Prince has taken away the crown, believing him already dead. He sends for his son instantly, and, on his entrance, orders every one to withdraw, and leave him alone with his heir.¹

Then ensues the grandest and most affecting scene in the whole play. The feeble King, knowing his end is near, rouses all the remaining force and energy of his powerful mind for a last exhortation to his dissolute, reckless, and hitherto disobedient son. He first reproaches him for taking the crown, and being apparently willing to believe in his death. As he proceeds in his impassioned appeal, the awful importance of the moment both to his own conscience and to the welfare of the kingdom inspires a new, irresistible eloquence. As his noble father, John of Gaunt, had exclaimed at a similar moment:

“The words of dying men
Enforce attention like deep harmony,”

so the illustrious son, when in his turn about to pay the debt of nature, finally adjures, convinces,

¹ “His illness had grown upon him during the last years of his life, so as to render him a burden to himself and to those around him. . . . His son's removal of the crown, which Shakespeare has immortalised, is rendered probable by the frequent discussions which had been raised in Henry's last years as to the necessity of his resigning the crown.”—Stanley's “Memorials of Westminster Abbey,” chap. v.

and improves his hitherto incorrigible heir. Henry had often before vainly appealed to the Prince's pride of birth and regard for his own dignity, as well as to his sense of public and private duty. Hitherto his remonstrances were naturally mingled with feelings of anger and scorn; they are now accompanied by a very different emotion—that of actual terror. The dying sovereign reasonably apprehends, like most of his thoughtful subjects, the coming degradation and perhaps ruin of his kingdom, as well as of his family. This dreadful idea, supported, indeed, by every sign of probability, he expresses in the powerful language of a noble yet excited mind, near the last moment of earthly existence.

“KING HENRY. For now a time is come to mock at form.
Harry the Fifth is crown'd :—Up, vanity!
Down, royal state ! all you sage counsellors, hence !
And to the English Court assemble now,
From every region, apes of idleness !
Now, neighbour confines, purge you of your scum :
Have you a ruffian that will swear, drink, dance,
Revel the night ; rob, murder, and commit
The oldest sins the newest kind of ways ?
Be happy, he will trouble you no more :
England shall double gild his treble guilt :
England shall give him office, honour, might :
For the fifth Harry from curb'd licence plucks
The muzzle of restraint, and the wild dog
Shall flesh his tooth in every innocent.
O, my poor kingdom, sick with civil blows !
When that my care could not withhold thy riots,
What wilt thou do when riot is thy care ?
O, thou wilt be a wilderness again,
Peopled with wolves, thy old inhabitants !”

Prince Henry might have heard the sternest re-

proaches, the most impassioned appeals, with comparative indifference; but the sight of his dying father, who had never feared the bravest foes, showing actual terror about his own future life and conduct was a spectacle he had never witnessed—perhaps never thought possible—and it apparently had great effect in producing that wonderful change in his character which amazed and gratified all England. He answers his father in the words and with the manner of perfect sincerity, promising future amendment. The King, despite his weakness, perceives his sincerity, and believes him, and thus his last moments are consoled.

After this final reconciliation, Prince John, the King's favourite son, enters the room, and almost the last words of his father are addressed to him with a pathos which probably the young man never forgot.

"PRINCE JOHN. Health, peace, and happiness to my royal father !

KING HENRY. Thou bring'st me happiness and peace, son John !
But health, alas ! with youthful wings is flown
From this bare, withered trunk : upon thy sight,
My worldly business makes a period."

The King is then borne into another apartment, called the Jerusalem Chamber,¹ where his eventful life ends in peace, though his death is not described.

Act V. is partly comic, partly serious. The first

¹ "Deriving the name of Jerusalem probably from tapestries or pictures of the history of Jerusalem; it was certainly the scene of his death."—Stanley's "Westminster Abbey," chap. v.

scene is in Gloucestershire, where Justice Shallow is entertaining Falstaff with his attendants, Bardolph and the page. Shallow is much hurried and flurried, between acting as host to Falstaff, whom he wants to please, and his magisterial business. His name well expresses his weak, silly character, of which his roguish servant Davy takes advantage by inducing him to befriend a well-known rascal named Visor, in a coming trial. Davy, with an impudent effrontery, like Falstaff on a small scale, easily induces Shallow to promise favour towards his roguish friend.

“DAVY. I beseech you, sir, to countenance Visor of Wincot against Clement Perkes of the hill.

SHALLOW. There are many complaints, Davy, against that Visor; that Visor is an arrant knave, on my knowledge.

DAVY. I grant your worship that he is a knave, sir: but yet, God forbid, sir, but a knave should have some countenance at his friend’s request. An honest man, sir, is able to speak for himself, when a knave is not. I have served your worship truly, sir, this eight years; and if I cannot once or twice in a quarter bear out a knave against an honest man, I have but very little credit with your worship. The knave is mine honest friend, sir; therefore, I beseech your worship, let him be countenanced.

SHALLOW. Go to; I say, he shall have no wrong.”

Shakespeare, by this sketch, probably means to give an amusing caricature of how the law was occasionally administered in country districts at this time.¹ While,

¹ “Justices of the Peace were first instituted in 1326. Their duties were described in the most general terms. They were ‘assigned to keep the peace,’ and empowered ‘to take and arrest all those they may find by indictment or suspicion and put them in prison.’”—Stephen’s “History of the English Criminal Law,” chap. vii.

however, Shallow is trying to please Falstaff, the latter worthy is observing the justice's many follies, for the sake of ridiculing him to Prince Henry when he returns to town, as he admits to himself.

"FALSTAFF. I will devise matter enough out of this Shallow to keep Prince Henry in continual laughter."

He evidently believes his influence with the Prince to be much greater than it ever was before, and has no idea that it is already over.

The next scene reverts to the palace in London, immediately after the King's death, where his younger sons, Judge Gascoigne, and other ministers are assembled. They are all mournful and apprehensive about the future conduct of the new King, who has apparently concealed his real character and intentions from his own brothers as completely as if they had been utter strangers. No one of them seems to understand him more than another, and their ignorance is strange, considering their ages and positions. His wild life hitherto has evidently inspired every one—relatives, courtiers, and ministers—with the same complete distrust; yet the idea of his being disinherited is never hinted at by any of them. His younger brothers, Chief Justice Gascoigne, and the ministers, Westmoreland and Warwick, discuss their future prospects with deep dejection, expressing sincere grief at the King's death, and equally sincere apprehension about the conduct of their new sovereign. The Princes frankly sympathise with Gascoigne, openly fearing that he may now suffer for having formerly

committed their brother to prison. The judge is evidently prepared for the worst; while the young Prince Thomas of Clarence even advises him to appease Falstaff if possible, whom they all think will soon have real power or influence in the kingdom.

“GASCOIGNE. Alas! I fear all will be overturned.

PRINCE JOHN. Though no man be assured what grace to find,
You stand in coldest expectation:

I am the sorrier; would 'twere otherwise.

CLARENCE. Well, you must now speak Sir John Falstaff fair.

JUDGE GASCOIGNE. Sweet Princes, what I did I did in honour,
Led by the impartial conduct of my soul;
If truth and upright innocency fail me,
I'll to the King my master that is dead,
And tell him who hath sent me after him.”

It is clear, from the words of the Princes, that their elder brother was on very distant terms with them, while associating familiarly with Falstaff, Poins, &c.; and that they are almost like strangers to him. When the youthful King joins this disconsolate assemblage, he immediately reassures his brothers, saying he is an English, not a Turkish prince, and observes with surprise that they “look strangely” on him. He then pretends to rebuke the Chief Justice for having imprisoned him, and thus elicits a long and dignified defence from the judge, which is what the young monarch evidently wishes to hear, and at its conclusion completely satisfies the old man, praising his firmness, and declaring he will follow his father's policy, by surrounding himself with his most trusted ministers.

“ KING HENRY V. The tide of blood in me
Hath proudly flow'd in vanity till now :
Now doth it turn, and ebb back to the sea ;
Where it shall mingle with the state of floods,
And flow henceforth in formal majesty.
Now call we our high court of Parliament :
And let us choose such limbs of noble counsel,
That the great body of our state may go
In equal rank with the best govern'd nation.

 . . .
No Prince, nor peer, shall have just cause to say,
Heaven shorten Harry's happy life one day.”

This important announcement, which has the effect of a proclamation, is heard by all present with admiring, thankful attention ; and the next scene is again in Justice Shallow's Gloucestershire abode. He and his friend Silence entertain Falstaff at one table, while Davy entertains Falstaff's servants, Bardolph and the page, at another. All these country people know something of Falstaff's strange intimacy with Prince Henry, and Davy, like his master, hopes to see London, and be well received there by Bardolph. While the whole party are thus enjoying themselves —Silence singing, and Falstaff, the most honoured guest, listening graciously—the bravo Pistol arrives with London news. This man, though a swaggering, quarrelsome boaster, like Poins and Peto, always talks in a curious, fantastic style, rather like the Euphuists in Queen Elizabeth's reign. He has now ridden in hot haste from London, longing to be the first to announce the welcome news of the accession of Henry V. Though he is overjoyed, expecting happy times of future dissipation and impunity, in common

with the Prince’s former companions, he still, amid his delight, preserves his vague, fanciful way of talking, which provokes Falstaff’s earnest request to tell his news

“Like a man of this world.”

Pistol then speaks plainly, and Falstaff immediately breaks forth into wild exultation. He may, perhaps, by this time have drunk too freely of Justice Shallow’s wine, otherwise the shrewd old knight would hardly have lost his self-control so completely in vehement rejoicing. But the young King has practically deceived associates, friends, foes, and relatives alike, almost as thoroughly as the most artful hypocrite could have done. Falstaff and his party, accordingly, are as thoroughly mistaken in the young monarch as his brothers and ministers are.

Sir John, now nearly frantic with delight, hastens immediately to London, after making vague promises to Shallow, and wildly boasting of his own imaginary influence.

“FALSTAFF. What! is the old King dead?

PISTOL. As nail in door: the things I speak are just.

FALSTAFF. Away, Bardolph; saddle my horse.—Master Robert Shallow, choose what office thou wilt in the land, 'tis thine.—Pistol, I will double-charge thee with dignities.

BARDOLPH. O joyful day!—

I would not take a knighthood for my fortune.

PISTOL. What! I do bring good news?

FALSTAFF. Master Shallow, my Lord Shallow, be what thou wilt, I am fortune’s steward. Get on thy boots: we’ll ride all night:—O, sweet Pistol!—Away, Bardolph. . . . I know the young King is sick for me. Let us take any man’s horses; the laws of England are at my commandment. Happy are they which have been my friends, and woe unto my Lord Chief Justice!”

The next scene is very short, partly comic, partly painful, describing the two women, Mrs. Quickly and Doll, roughly dragged to prison by some beadle, who then performed, probably with great harshness, the duties of modern policemen.¹ These hapless women, both probably drunk, abuse and revile their captors, who hint that there have been lives lost lately in the Boar's Head, and that Pistol was one of the homicides or murderers. It is likely that Mrs. Quickly's establishment, in the absence of Prince Henry and Falstaff, became the scene of more dangerous revels than before, when the rank of the former, and the shrewd wit of the latter, were no longer there to inspire awe or preserve good-humour. Nothing, however, transpires about the alleged fray, and the women, longing for Falstaff to rescue them, are taken to jail, scolding and threatening the beadle, with much the same coarse, spiteful mockery still sometimes displayed in police courts.

"HOSTESS. No, thou arrant knave; I would I might die that I might have thee hanged: thou hast drawn my shoulder out of joint.

1ST BEADLE. The constables have delivered her over to me: and she shall have whipping-cheer enough, I warrant her. . . . Come, I charge you both go with me; for the man is dead that you and Pistol beat among you.

DOLL. I will have you as soundly swinged for this, you blue-bottled rogue! you filthy famished correctioner; if you be not swinged, I'll forswear half-kirtles.

¹ "From the earliest times to our own days there were two bodies of police in England, namely, the parish and high constables, and the watchmen in cities and boroughs. Nothing could exceed the inefficiency of the constables and watchmen."—Stephen's "English Criminal Law," chap. vii.

BEADLE. Come, come, you she knight-errant, come.

HOSTESS. O, that right should thus overcome might!

DOLL. Come, you rogue, come; bring me to a justice.

HOSTESS. Yes; come, you starved bloodhound.

DOLL. Come, you thin thing; come, you rascal.

BEADLE. Very well.”

The last scene returns to London, where Falstaff, Shallow, Pistol, and Bardolph are assembled in a public place near Westminster Abbey, which the King is about to pass in a state procession. Falstaff feels sure that the young sovereign will recognise and welcome him. He places Pistol behind him, while Shallow is beside him, Bardolph and the page being near, when the King approaches, attended by many courtiers, and also by Chief Justice Gascoigne. Falstaff instantly addresses his former young patron, and calls him

“ My royal Hal.”

Pistol also greets him as

“ Most royal imp of fame!”

The King first tells Gascoigne to answer, but the judge is so shocked at Falstaff’s freedom that he can only ask him if he is in his senses, and knows what he says. Falstaff takes no notice of him, but persists in addressing the King, who then replies with stern gravity, bids him fall to his prayers, and no longer to think him the same man he was, for that he has turned away his former self, and also his previous company. He even banishes |

Sir John from his presence, forbidding him, on pain of death, to approach him nearer than ten miles. Then, perhaps remembering Falstaff's desperate circumstances, and that he will now lose all credit after being thus cast off, and probably be ruined, he promises him an unearned

“Competence of life, . . .
That lack of means enforce you not to evil,”

and directs Gascoigne

“To see performed the tenor of our word,”

though that judge is probably the least likely of all people to recommend liberality to Falstaff.

The King then passes on, and Shallow, who, with Falstaff's other companions, is grievously disappointed at this reception, now asks the poor old knight to repay a thousand pounds he had lent him. Falstaff, though doubtless amazed, like the rest, at the King's words, has yet too much buoyancy and self-confidence to believe himself really abandoned to the mercies of Judge Gascoigne, and flatters himself that Henry will send for him at night, having merely assumed this new manner towards him for some reasons of state. Shallow, however, despite his simplicity, is alarmed about his money, and begs for half of it, which Falstaff is apparently unable to pay. Sir John then asks both Shallow and Pistol to dine with him that evening, still persuading himself that he will yet be summoned at night to the palace, when enter his two

chief enemies, young and old, Prince John and Judge Gascoigne, neither of whom his wit could ever amuse or his effrontery deceive. Gascoigne immediately orders Falstaff and all his company to be conveyed to the Fleet Prison. Sir John attempts a remonstrance, but is removed a prisoner with his companions—an act for which there appears little or no reason at that moment.¹ For the Prince could hardly have expected Falstaff's reformation, were such a thing ever possible, to commence precisely at the same time as his own. Prince John, however, intimates to Gascoigne that all the imprisoned party will be “provided for,” but that

“All are banished till their conversations
Appear more wise and modest to the world.”

Falstaff's imprisonment probably was only meant to be a short one, to convince him and others that his influence with the King was over.²

¹ Dr. Johnson thinks Falstaff's imprisonment an act of cruelty. Messrs. Dowden and Furnivall apparently think the young King was right. The former says:—“As no terms of half-acquaintance are possible with the fat knight, Henry must become to Falstaff an absolute stranger. Henry has been stern to his former self; therefore he can be stern to Falstaff.” Mr. Furnivall writes:—“What other reception could Henry, in the midst of his new state, give in public to the debauched old sinner? . . . His end here is imprisonment for a time.”

² As Shakespeare had no wish to represent the young monarch unfairly, it is evident that Henry only intended a slight punishment for Falstaff,—as Hume writes: “Henry V. called together his former companions, acquainted them with his intended reformation, exhorted them to imitate his example, but strictly inhibited them, till they had given proofs of their sincerity in this particular, from appearing any more in his presence, and he then dismissed them, with liberal presents” (“History of England,” chap. xix.).

Prince John and Gascoigne are now the men highest in the King's confidence, and in the last lines of this play John anticipates a war with France, which soon ensues. The play thus leaves Henry V. newly crowned, and surrounded by the late King's most trusted ministers. His former wild associates are either banished from his presence or imprisoned. The peaceful and respectable of his subjects are thus soon convinced of their young sovereign's thorough reformation, for he certainly behaved thenceforth as if the admonishing spirit of his illustrious father inspired his thoughts and directed his actions.

VI

"THE MERRY WIVES OF WINDSOR"

IN this lively, cheerful play, one of the most amusing of Shakespeare's creations, Sir John Falstaff reappears, not so martial as before, but as witty, confident, and boastful as ever.¹ The old idea that Queen Elizabeth desired this play to be written to describe Falstaff in love, though not proved true, is yet apparently believed or to some extent trusted by two of the ablest Shakespearian scholars of the nineteenth century. Mr. Howard Staunton² says: "We can by no means afford to part with this tradition; it accounts for the many evidences of haste observable in the first draft of the piece, and reconciles all the difficulties which are experienced in attempting to determine whether the incidents are to be taken as occurring before the historical plays of 'Henry IV.', Parts 1st and 2nd, of 'Henry V.', or between any two of them, or after the whole." Mr. Furnivall writes: "As the order was given, Shakespeare had to carry it out." He adds of this play:

¹ "It is Shakespeare's only play of contemporary manners and direct sketch of middle-class English life."—Furnivall's notes to the "Royal Shakespeare," 1883.

² 1858.

“There are no grandes in it, though we have reflections of the Court ; the use of Windsor traditions in it points to a performance of the play at Windsor.” Once only does this interesting play appear as describing a time after the reign of Henry IV., in Act III., Scene 2, where “the wild Prince and Poins” are named as existing before its time. The first scene reintroduces old Justice Shallow, whose character is indicated by his name, and two new personages, Sir Hugh Evans, a Welsh parson, and Mr. Slender, a young cousin of Shallow, and nearly, if not quite, as simple or silly as his old relative. The scene is at Windsor, and their talk is about Sir John Falstaff. Shallow, indignant and full of self-importance, exclaims to Evans, who is evidently trying to pacify or restrain him :

“Sir Hugh, persuade me not . . . if he were twenty Sir John Falstaffs, he shall not abuse Robert Shallow, Esquire.”

The irritated, silly old Justice tries to magnify his quarrel with Falstaff into an important case to lay before the Star Chamber, while his yet more foolish young relative, Abraham Slender, apparently wishing to puff up Shallow’s vanity, boasts of his little distinctions, adding to that of esquire :

“In the county of Gloucester, Justice of the Peace and *coram*.”

Old Shallow continues :

“Aye, cousin Slender, and *Cust-alorum.*”¹

¹ “Correctly, Shallow’s designation was Justice of the Peace and of the Quorum and Custos Rotulorum.”—Staunton’s notes.

Slender, as vain as his old relative, proceeds, addressing Evans, while sometimes mispronouncing Latin words :

“Ay, and *ratolorum* too ; and a gentleman born, master parson, who writes himself *armigero* in any bill, warrant, quittance, or obligation, *armigero*.”

Shallow, more proud of his ancestry than they would likely have been of him, rejoins :

“Ay, that I do ; and have done any time these three hundred years.”

Slender proceeds in the same silly style, while Evans seems to listen patiently :

“All his successors gone before him hath done ‘t ; and all his ancestors that come after him may.”

Evans, sympathising with Shallow in an eccentric way, though neither is a match for Falstaff in wit or shrewdness, says, coming to the point :

“If Sir John Falstaff have committed disparagements unto you, I am of the church, and will be glad to do my penevolence to make atonements and compromises between you.”

Shallow, resenting what he considers Falstaff’s insults to him, exclaims :

“The Council shall hear it : it is a riot.”

Evans, a simple, or rather blundering, man, always well-meaning and pacific, remarks :

“It is not meet the Council hear a riot ; there is no fear of Got in a riot ; the Council, look you, shall desire to hear the fear of Got and not to hear a riot ; take your vizaments in that.”

Shakespeare usually makes Evans speak in a broad Welsh accent, while he seldom, if ever, makes Londoners speak in their peculiar or "Cockney" style, and misplace their *h*'s; though he was likely well acquainted with it. Sir Hugh Evans now tries to pacify his old friend Shallow, who, apparently recalling the days of his youth, irritably exclaims:

"Ha! o' my life, if I were young again the sword should end it."

The peaceful Welsh parson replies:

"It is better that friends is the sword and end it, and there is also another device in my brain which peradventure brings good discretions with it. There is Anne Page, which is daughter to Master George Page, which is pretty virginity."

Slender, who evidently knows her by sight, exclaims:

"She has brown hair, and speaks small, like a woman."

Evans declares she is rich and would be a good match for Slender, adding, in a practical spirit:

"It were a good motion if we leave our pribbles and prabbles and desire a marriage between Master Abraham and Mistress Anne Page."

This idea pleases old Shallow, who wishes to see Anne's father and hears that Falstaff is now in Page's house. Evans, as becomes a pacifying clergyman, exhorts the irritated Shallow to keep his temper when meeting Falstaff; Page enters admitting that Falstaff is in his house, and, like Evans, wishes to be

a peacemaker ; while, after thanking Shallow for a present of venison, says, alluding to Falstaff :

“I would I could do a good office between you.”

Evans observes :

“It is spoke as a Christian ought to speak,”

and Shallow, still offended with Falstaff, exclaims :

“He hath wronged me, Master Page.”

The other replies that Falstaff confesses it, and Shallow retorts :

“If it be confessed, it is not redressed, is not that so, Master Page? He hath wronged me, indeed he hath, at a word he hath; believe me, Robert Shallow, Esquire, saith he is wronged.”

Shallow, as if sinking into dotage, or something like it, is full of vanity, yet by his position, and perhaps by his previous character, retains some apparent influence over both Evans and Page, who never ridicule him. Falstaff now enters with his three wild followers, Bardolph, Nym, and Pistol. He evidently well knows Shallow’s character or state of mind, diverting himself and his followers by asking the silly old Justice, with all the provoking calmness of his rare sarcastic powers :

“Now, Master Shallow, you’ll complain of me to the King?”

But which King Falstaff means is not stated here, whether the shrewd Henry IV. or his wild son,

Henry V. ; probably the latter, with whom Falstaff was formerly so familiar. Yet the witty old rogue seems as confident as ever, still attended by the same unscrupulous followers, and apparently quite unchanged by the stern censure which the young King, Henry V., had passed upon him on ascending the English throne. Perhaps knowing that Shallow is now almost doting or utterly foolish, and more ridiculed than feared or believed, Falstaff feels sure he has little to dread from his deceived old friend's present confused anger with him. Shallow, however, as if provoked by Falstaff's calm manner, now sums up his grievances, exclaiming :

“ Knight, you have beaten my men, killed my deer, and broke open my lodge.”

To these charges Falstaff, perhaps alluding to some plain woman in Shallow's service, replies :

“ But not kissed your keeper's daughter ! ”

Shallow, as if puzzled at such provoking coolness, replies hastily :

“ Tut, a pin ! this shall be answered.”

Falstaff, ever ready with a sharp retort, replies :

“ I will answer it straight : I have done all this. That is now answered.”

Shallow angrily continues :

“ The Council shall know this.”

Falstaff, quibbling with the word, scornfully answers :

“ ‘Twere better for you if it were known in counsel :¹ you’ll be laughed at.”

Evans, anxious for peace, interposes :

“ *Pauca verba*, Sir John, good worts.”

Falstaff, often ridiculing the Welsh accent, retorts :

“ Good worts²—good cabbage.”

Then, scornfully addressing the simple, or rather nervous, Slender, he asks :

“ Slender, I broke your head ; what matter have you against me ?”

Slender indignantly replies :

“ Marry, sir, I have matter in my head against you and against your coney-catching rascals, Bardolph, Nym, and Pistol.”

He proceeds in detail, likely to the amusement of the three listening rogues :

“ They carried me to the tavern and made me drunk, and afterwards picked my pocket.”

Bardolph, like his two associates, utterly scorns the simple complainant, exclaiming :

“ You Banbury cheese !”³

¹ “ In secrecy.”—Staunton’s notes.

² “ Coleworts.”—Ibid.

³ “ A soft, thin cream cheese.”—Ibid.

Slender petulantly or timidly answers :

“ Ay, it is no matter,”

while the bully Pistol calls him “ Mephistopheles,” which apparently shows that Shakespeare had heard of the old German legend of Dr. Faust and his fiendish tempter. The name, however, was sometimes applied to a thin or lanthorn-jawed fellow,¹ which Slender probably was. Nym also defies Slender, but Evans, as becoming his profession, tries to make peace, but in a pompous way, exclaiming :

“ Peace, I pray you ! Now let us understand : there is three umpires in this matter as I understand : that is—Master Page, *fidelicet* Master Page, and there is myself, *fidelicet* myself and the three party is lastly and finally, mine Host of the Garter.”

Page assents, and Evans, in his Welsh accent, exclaims :

“ Fery goot, I will make a prief of it in my note-book. . . .”

Falstaff, apparently quite at his ease among this company, and likely secretly laughing at them, addresses his wild adherent, Pistol, and his impudent follower smartly replies of himself :

“ He hears with ears.”

Evans, as if irritated at this fellow’s coolness, exclaims :

“ The devil and his tam ! what phrase is this, ‘ He hears with ear ? ’ Why, it is affectations.”

¹ Staunton’s notes.

Falstaff calmly continues questioning his follower :

“Pistol, did you pick Master Slender’s purse ?”

Slender eagerly repeats the accusation :

“Ay, by these gloves did he,”

and then mentions various sums of money which he believes Pistol has robbed from him. Falstaff again asks :

“Is this true, Pistol ?”

while Evans interposes :

“No, it is false, if it is a pick-purse.”

Pistol, now getting quarrelsome, replies to the Welshman :

“Ha, thou mountain foreigner ! Sir John and master mine,
I combat challenge of this latten bilbo.¹
Word of denial in thy labras² here ;
Word of denial, froth and scum, thou liest.”

Slender, as if roused by these insults, retorts, perhaps now accusing Nym :

“By these gloves, then ‘twas he.”

Nym scornfully replies :

“Be advised, sir, and pass good humours ; I will say marry trap

¹ “A sword wanting both edge and temper.”—Staunton’s notes.

² “Lips.”

with you if you run the nuthook's humour on me ;¹ that is the very note of it."

Slender, as if now inclined to suspect Bardolph, exclaims with comic frankness :

" By this hat, then, he in the red face had it, for though I cannot remember what I did when you made me drunk, yet I am not altogether an ass."

Falstaff asks Bardolph about the matter, who, availing himself of Slender's intemperance, replies :

" Why, sir, for my part I say, the gentleman had drunk himself out of his five sentences."

Evans, who, despite his Welsh accent, knows English better than Bardolph, exclaims :

" It is his five senses ; fie, what the ignorance is ! "

Bardolph, thoroughly shameless and despising the foolish Slender, proceeds in his pretended excuse to Falstaff :

" And being fap, sir, was, as they say, cashiered."²

Slender, however, too late perceiving that he is no match for the three rogues in cunning or in impudence, finally exclaims, as if trying to combine his weakness for drink with some idea of respectability :

¹ " Nuthook was the slang title of a catch-pole. Nym threatens poor Slender with the *marry trap* if he *comes the constable over him by charging him with theft.*"—Staunton's notes.

² " Being drunk was cleared out."—Ibid.

“Ay, you spoke in Latin then, too ; but 'tis no matter, I'll ne'er be drunk while I live again, but in honest, civil, godly company, for this trick. If I be drunk, I'll be drunk with those that have the fear of God, and not with drunken knaves.”

Evans, with some sympathy, as if wishing to make the best of him, adds :

“So, Got 'udge me, that is a virtuous mind,”

while Falstaff coolly observes to all around, with his usual calm effrontery :

“You hear all these matters denied, gentlemen ; you hear it.”

This they certainly do, but neither Evans nor Slender can get redress from the bravoes, Nym, Bardolph, and Pistol, over whom at present Falstaff has considerable though not absolute influence. Anne Page now enters with her mother and Mrs. Ford, while Page himself, evidently an easygoing, hospitable man, invites all this strange company to his house to enjoy a “hot venison pasty,” a meat likely often obtainable in the neighbourhood of Windsor forest, adding :

“I hope we shall drink down all unkindness.”

Slender, in love with Miss Page, remains a short time with Shallow and Evans after the others have left, regretting in a silly way that he had not his book of songs and sonnets with him, to captivate Anne. His servant, Simple, described by his name, enters, and his equally silly master, longing to make

himself agreeable, asks if he has not the "Book of Riddles" with him, when Simple provokingly answers :

"*Book of Riddles!* Why, did you not lend it to Alice Shortcake?"

probably some lover of Slender, not introduced in the play. Evans and Shallow now both try to persuade Slender to make love to Anne Page. And Slender, after some nervous hesitation, often misplacing his words, definitely answers Shallow :

"I will marry her, sir, at your request, but if there be no great love in the beginning, yet heaven may decrease it upon better acquaintance when we are married and have more occasion to know one another: I hope upon familiarity will grow more contempt, but if you say *marry* her, I will marry her, that I am freely dissolved and dissolutely."

Evans, wishing to encourage the timid, half-silly Slender, observes with qualified approval :

"It is a fery discretion answer, save the faul is in the 'ort *dis-*solutely': the 'ort is, according to our meaning, resolutely—his meaning is goot."

Shallow, who, though foolish himself, cannot help rather despising Slender, exclaims like Evans :

"Ay, I think my cousin meant well,"

while the simple Slender, knowing he is between two friends, earnestly declares :

"Ay, or else I would I might be hanged."

Anne now re-enters, when old Shallow gallantly exclaims :

“Would I were young for your sake, Mistress Anne !”

Miss Page, equally indifferent to her old and young admirer, says her father is waiting dinner for them. Shallow and Evans, as if by common consent, depart, leaving Anne Page and Slender, with the latter's servant Simple, together. Anne repeats that her father's dinner is waiting, while Slender, saying he is not hungry, sends away Simple, and then, as if to convince Anne of the comfort or luxury of his home, exclaims :

“A justice of peace sometime may be beholden to his friend for a man. I keep but three men and a boy yet, till my mother be dead, but what though ? I live like a poor gentleman born.”

Anne, who evidently takes no interest in him or his affairs, again asks him to dinner, observing, to hurry him :

“I may not go in without your worship : they will not sit till you come.”

Slender, wishing Anne to know he loves her, yet too shy or awkward to speak plainly, declares he can eat nothing, while she again asks him to walk in. Slender then, hoping to interest her, replies :

“I had rather walk here, I thank you.”

Then, boasting, as if wishing to be thought an able swordsman by Anne, he proceeds :

"I bruised my shin the other day with playing at sword and dagger with a master of fence.¹ . . . Why do your dogs bark so? Be there bears in the town?"

Anne replies :

"I think there are, sir; I heard them talked of."

Slender, wishing her to think him a man of great courage, replies :

"I love the sport well,"

meaning probably bear-baiting;

"but I shall as soon quarrel at it as any man in England. You are afraid if you see the bear loose, are you not?"

Anne truly replies :

"Ay indeed, sir."

Slender, pretending to fear nothing or to love danger, exclaims :

"That's meat and drink to me, now."

Then, alluding to a well-known oddly-named bear exhibited in Paris at this time,² proceeds :

"I have seen Sackerson loose twenty times and have taken him by the chain, but I warrant you the women have so cried and shrieked at it that it surpassed."³

¹ "One who had taken his master's degree in the noble science of fencing."—Staunton's notes.

² *Ibid.*

³ "Surpassed belief."

Then, as if excusing feminine timidity, he adds :

“But women, indeed, cannot abide ‘em ; they are very ill-favoured, rough things.”

Page now re-enters, impatient of waiting, and asking Slender in to dinner. The latter pretends to have no appetite, and asks Anne to lead the way ; she refuses, and he finally exclaims, as if puzzled what to do :

“I’ll rather be unmannerly than troublesome ; you do yourself wrong, indeed,”

and all then enter Page’s hospitable abode, where Evans privately tells Simple, Slender’s servant, to take a letter to a certain French Dr. Caius’s house, and give it to the doctor’s housekeeper, Mrs. Quickly, whom he calls—

“Caius’s nurse, or his dry nurse, or his cook, or his laundry,”

and proceeds :

“Give her this letter, for it is a ‘oman that altogether acquaints with Mistress Anne Page, and the letter is to desire and require her to solicit your master’s desires to Mistress Anne Page.”

Simple perhaps hesitates, as Evans continues, reverting to his Welsh accent and tastes :

“I pray you pe gone, I’ll make an end of my dinner ; there’s pippins and cheese to come.”

The next scene is in the Garter Inn, where Falstaff, his page Robin, Bardolph, Nym, and Pistol

are together, with the lively host of the establishment, who, apparently proud of Falstaff's patronage, calls him his "bully-rook,"¹ adding :

"Speak scholarly and wisely."

Falstaff, perhaps ashamed of some of his rakish followers, or thinking the host is, declares he must turn them away. The host, as if pleased, replies :

"Discard, bully Hercules ; cashier ; let them wag ; trot, trot."

Falstaff, on good terms with his host and wishing to remain so, continues :

"I sit at ten pounds a week."

The host, evidently anxious to please his guest, rejoins with compliments :

"Thou'rt an emperor, Cæsar, Keisar and Pheezar."

Then, as if selecting Falstaff's chief favourite for retention in service, says :

"I will entertain Bardolph ; he shall draw, he shall tap ; said I well, bully Hector ?"

Falstaff approves and the host departs, saying :

"I have spoke, let him follow. Let me see thee froth and lime :² I am at a word, follow";

¹ "Jolly dog."—Staunton's notes.

² "A cant term for a tapster."—Ibid.

and Falstaff, recommending Bardolph’s new profession, says :

“Bardolph, follow him ; a tapster is a good trade ; an old cloak makes a new jerkin ; a withered serving-man a fresh tapster ; go, adieu.”

Bardolph, evidently hopeful and highly pleased, answers :

“It is a life that I have desired : I will thrive,”

and follows the host. His comrades, Pistol and Nym, are evidently angry, while Falstaff is too shrewd for the whole trio. Pistol, as if envying or scorning Bardolph, exclaims :

“O base Hungarian wight, wilt thou the spigot wield ?”

Nym sullenly adds, in much the same spirit :

“His mind is not heroic, and there’s the humour of it.”

Falstaff says, affecting to despise the absent Bardolph before his envious comrade :

“I am glad I am so acquit of this tinder-box ; his thefts were too open ; his filching was like an unskilled singer ; he kept not time.”

Nym and Pistol, as proud as the Artful Dodger and Charley Bates of their cunning and rather similar profession, alike praise it. Nym exclaims :

“The good humour is, to steal at a minute’s rest.”

Pistol, more choice in words than his comrade, but the same in principle, exclaims :

“Convey, the wise call it ; steal ! foх, a·fico for the phrase !”

Falstaff now deems it time to attend practically to their finances, exclaiming :

“Well, sirs, I am almost out at heels.”

Pistol comically replies :

“Why, then, let kibes ¹ ensue.”

Falstaff proceeds :

“There is no remedy. I must coney-catch ; I must shift.”

Pistol, hearing these words, makes a singular comparison between himself and Nym, with birds feeding on carrion, exclaiming :

“Young ravens must have food.”

Falstaff then partly unfolds his future scheme in which he needs their help, which they finally refuse to give, much to their old patron’s indignation. Falstaff asks cautiously :

“Which of you know Ford of this town ?”

Pistol replies :

“I ken the wight ; he is of substance good.”

¹ “Chilblains.”—Staunton’s notes.

Falstaff proceeds, addressing both alike :

“My honest lads, I will tell you what I am about.”

Pistol jokingly replies, as if taking Falstaff’s measure :

“Two yards and more,”

but Falstaff, in no mood for joking, replies :

“No quips now, Pistol,”

yet, as if almost inclined to make puns, he continues :

“Indeed, I am in the *waist* two yards about, but I am now about no *waste* ; I am about thrift. Briefly, I do mean to make love to Ford’s wife ; I spy entertainment in her ; she discourses, she gives the leer of invitation. . . . I can construe the action of her familiar style, and the hardest voice of her behaviour, to be Englished rightly, is, *I am Sir John Falstaff’s*.”

Pistol and Nym, eagerly listening, exclaim, as if partly to each other, the former :

“He hath studied her well, and translated her well : out of honesty into English.”

and Nym observes :

“The anchor is deep,¹ will that humour pass ?”

Falstaff, without noticing their words, calmly proceeds :

“Now the report goes, she has all the rule of her husband’s purse ; she hath legions of angels.”

¹ “Nym in his fustian language perhaps means that he does not fathom the object of this love to Ford’s wife ; when he hears, however, that the ultimate end is to pocket her ‘legions of angels,’ ‘the humour rises, it is good.’”—Staunton’s notes.

Pistol hearing this eagerly exclaims :

“To her boy, say I,”

while Nym, apparently in the same mind, exclaims :

“The humour rises, it is good : humour me the angels.”

Falstaff deliberately continues :

“I have writ me a letter to her ; I have another to Page’s wife, who even now gave me good eyes too . . . sometimes the beam of her view gilded my foot, sometimes my portly belly.”

Pistol here exclaims, perhaps only for Nym to hear :

“Then did the sun on dunghill shine,”

and Nym replies, as if both secretly rather ridiculed their patron :

“I thank thee for thy humour.”

Falstaff, however, apparently believing he has . . .
attracted Mrs. Page, proceeds in a kind of fanciful vanity :

“O, she did so course o’er my exteriors . . . that the appetite of her eye did seem to scorch me up like a burning-glass ! Here’s another letter to her ; she bears the purse too ; she is a region in Guiana, all gold and bounty. I will be cheater¹ to them both, and they shall be exchequers to me ; they shall be my East and West Indies, and I will trade to them both.”

¹ “The popular name for *escheaters*, those officers employed to certify to the Exchequer what *escheats* fall to the Crown through forfeiture.”—Staunton’s notes.

Then, singling out his two subordinates, he proceeds, expecting they will be readily obedient :

“Go, bear thou this letter to Mistress Page, and thou this to Mistress Ford.”

In evident gleeful expectation, the old schemer adds, to encourage his hearers :

“We will thrive, lads, we will thrive.”

To Falstaff’s surprise, probably, his two followers alike refuse to aid him, Nym even rudely exclaiming :

“I will run no base humour : here, take the humour-letter ; I will keep the ‘haviour of reputation.”

Falstaff, for once in his life like Richard III., in employing boys when men fail him, exclaims to his page Robin, a silent hearer of this strange scene :

“ . . . Bear you these letters tightly :¹
Sail like my pinnace to these golden shores.”

Then angrily dismissing his followers, though in no worse language than they both richly deserve :

“Rogues, hence ! avaunt ! vanish like hailstones, go !
Trudge, plod away o’ the hoof ; seek shelter, pack !
Falstaff will learn the humour of this age,
French thrift, you rogues ; myself and skirted page.”²

So saying Falstaff indignantly departs, closely

¹ “Promptly.”—Staunton’s notes.

² “Alluding to the custom then prevalent in France of making a smart page serve the purpose of a tribe of retainers.”—Ibid.

followed by his page Robin. This boy, though witnessing so many funny scenes, takes little part in any of them, and seems rather a dull sample of his age ; many lads with such a master as Falstaff would have learned or imitated some of his wit and humour, of which this youth hardly shows any sign. Falstaff's two discharged followers, when alone, in their turn angrily and coarsely abuse him, but not with actual hatred. Pistol calls him, "Base Phrygian Turk" while Nym, more practical, declares that he will have revenge, saying :

"I will discuss the humour of this love to Page."

Pistol rejoins in the same spirit, but more poetically :

"And I to Ford shall eke unfold,
How Falstaff, varlet vile,
His dove will prove, his gold will hold,
And his soft couch defile."

Nym, perhaps more angry than Pistol, or more plain-spoken, adds :

"My humour shall not cool ; I will incense Page to deal with poison ; . . . this is my true humour."

Pistol, admiring and trusting his determined comrade, rejoins :

"Thou art the Mars of malcontents ; I second that ; troop on,"

and they depart together.

The next scene is in the Frenchman's, Dr. Caius's house, where his servants, Mrs. Quickly and John

Rugby, with Slender’s man Simple, are together. Mrs. Quickly, who is sharpness itself compared to the other two, addresses Rugby :

“I pray thee, go to the casement and see if you can see my master, Dr. Caius, coming : if he do, i’ faith, and find anybody in the house, here will be an old ‘ abusing of God’s patience and the King’s English.”

Rugby obeys, and Mrs. Quickly, knowing how stupid he is, exclaims after he departs :

“An honest, willing, kind fellow, and I warrant you no tell-tale.”

She then asks Simple his name and about his master. Slender describes him as “a tall man of his hands,” meaning that he is able or bold, and Mrs. Quickly exclaims :

“Well, Heaven send Anne Page no worse fortune ! Tell master parson Evans I will do what I can for your master.”

This cunning woman then praises Anne, as Rugby returns, speaking in evident fear that Dr. Caius is coming. Mrs. Quickly, despite her artfulness, is yet afraid of her passionate master, exclaiming :

“We shall all be shent ;”²

then says to Simple :

“Run in here, good young man,”

(shutting him in the closet) and adds :

‘He will not stay long.’

¹ “Rare.”

² “Undone.”—Staunton’s notes.

Then, pretending not to know Caius is coming, she exclaims to Rugby :

“Go, John, go, inquire for my master ; I doubt he be not well that he comes not home,”

and begins to sing as the excitable Caius, who is generally in a passion, enters, asking in the French accent and style, which Shakespeare represents to perfection :

“Vot is it you sing ? I do not like dese toys ; pray you go and vetch me in my closet *un boitier verd* ; a box, a green-a box ; do intend vat I speak ? a green-a box.”

Mrs. Quickly, naturally rather afraid of this irritable gentleman, whose temper is probably aggravated by being entirely among English people, many of whom would scarcely resist laughing at him, replies aloud :

“Ay, forsooth, I'll fetch it you,”

and says to herself :

“I am glad he went not in himself ; if he had found the young man, he would have been horn-mad.”

Caius exclaims, complaining of the heat in French and broken English :

“Fe, fe, fe, fe, ma fai, il fait bien chaud,”

and says he must go to the Court about some important matter. He receives the box from Mrs. Quickly, telling her to hurry herself and put it in his

pocket, and then orders Rugby to follow him with his rapier, when suddenly he exclaims :

“Dere is some simples in my closet dat I vill not for de varld I shall leave behind !”

Accordingly, to Mrs. Quickly’s terror, he opens the closet and drags out the unlucky and helpless Simple, calling out :

“O diable, vat is in my closet ? Villainy ! Rugby, my rapier.”

Mrs. Quickly, fearing violence, exclaims :

“Good master, be content,”

while he, in rather reasonable anger, asks .

“Verefore shall I be content ?”

She declares :

“The young man is an honest man,’

when he retorts :

“Vat shall de honest man do in my closet ? dere is no honest man dat shall come in my closet.”

Mrs. Quickly, vainly trying to calm him, perhaps makes matters worse by assuring Caius that Simple has come from Parson Hugh Evans, when Slender foolishly proceeds :

“To desire this honest gentlewoman, your maid, to speak a good word to Mistress Anne Page for my master in the way of marriage.”

Mrs. Quickly, now despairing of further denial, tries to excuse herself by exclaiming :

“ This is all indeed, but I’ll ne’er put my finger in the fire, and need not.”

The enraged Frenchman immediately resolves on a duel and at once silently writes out a challenge to Evans, while Mrs. Quickly, as if relieved and not knowing what he is writing, says to Simple :

“ I am glad he is so quiet ; if he had been thoroughly moved, you should have heard him so loud . . . but notwithstanding, man, I’ll do your master what good I can.”

Then, detailing all she does in her not very easy situation, she proceeds :

“ And the very yea and the no is the French doctor, my master —I may call him my master, look you, for I keep his house, and I wash, wring, brew, bake, scour, dress meat and drink, make the beds and do all myself.”

Simple, believing her, naturally exclaims :

“ Tis a great charge, to come under one body’s hand.”

Mrs. Quickly confidently continues :

“ You shall find it a great charge, and to be up early and down late.”

Then, as if having boasted or complained enough, she cunningly changes the subject, and proceeds to the listening, credulous Simple :

“ But notwithstanding (to tell you in your ear I would have no words of it) my master himself is in love with Mistress Anne Page,

but notwithstanding that—I know Anne’s mind—that’s neither here nor there.”

Caius now, having finished his letter of defiance, exclaims in his usual vehement way to Simple :

“ You jack-an-ape give-a dis letter to Sir Hugh ; by gar, it is a shallege ; I vill cut his troat in de park, and I vill teach a scurvy jack-an-ape priest to meddle or make.”

Simple probably stands listening and frightened, so Caius proceeds impatiently :

“ You may be gone, it is not good you tarry here.”

Simple then departs, while Mrs. Quickly, trying to pacify Caius, exclaims, meaning that Evans is only acting for Slender :

“ Alas, he speaks but for his friend” ;

Caius, apparently resolved on a duel, replies :

“ It is no matter-a vor dat,”

then asks her : ‡

“ Do not you tell-a me dat I shall have Anne Page for myself ? by gar, I vill kill de Jack priest, and I have appointed mine host of de *Jarterre* to measure our weapons ; by gar, I vill myself have Anne Page.”

Mrs. Quickly, timidly anxious to stand well with everybody while keeping her real mind steadily to herself, again tries to soothe her angry master, assuring him, while knowing otherwise all the time :

“ Sir, the maid loves you, and all shall be well” ;

then, trying to excuse Simple's talkativeness, adds :

“We must give folks leave to prate.”

Caius, still irritated, exclaims to his two frightened servants, perhaps beginning to suspect Mrs. Quickly :

“Rugby, come to the Court vit me—by gar, if I have not Anne Page I shall turn your head out of my door. Follow my heels, Rugby.”

He departs with his man, and Mrs. Quickly, when alone, ventures to express her real feeling about both Caius and Anne :

“You shall have An fool’s head of your own. No ! I know Anne’s mind for that.”

Here Mrs. Quickly, despite her cunning, may rather deceive herself, for Miss Page has hitherto kept her own counsel closely, but the sly woman continues, quite confident in her own shrewdness :

“Never a woman in Windsor knows more of Anne’s mind than I do, nor can do more with her, I thank Heaven.”

At this moment Anne’s accepted lover, a young Mr. Fenton, enters, kindly greeting Mrs. Quickly, and asking after “pretty Mistress Anne.” Evidently believing Mrs. Quickly to be his friend, he asks :

“Shall I do any good, thinkest thou ? Shall I not lose my suit ?”

Mrs. Quickly, in the style of a pious person, which she is very far from being, replies :

“Truth, sir, all is in His hands alone, but notwithstanding, Master Fenton, I'll be sworn on a book she loves you.”

She then asks him an odd question :

“Have not your worship a wart above your eye?”

Fenton, doubtless surprised at this query, replies :

“Yes, marry have I, what of that?”

Mrs. Quickly rejoins :

“Well, thereby hangs a tale. . . . We had an hour's talk over that wart—I shall never laugh but in that maid's company!—But indeed she's given too much to allicholy and musing, but for you—well, go to.”

Fenton, quite trusting as well as bribing the sly woman, replies :

“Well, I shall see her to-day; hold, there's money for thee; let me have thy voice in my behalf; if thou seest her before me, commend me.”

Mrs. Quickly eagerly interrupts, likely well pleased with his money :

“Will I? faith, that we will, and I will tell your worship more of the wart, the next time we have confidence, and of other wooers.”

He departs, and she says when alone :

“Truly an honest gentleman, but Anne loves him not; for I know Anne's mind as well as another does.”

Then, as if remembering what she does not mention, she exclaims :

“Out upon 't, what have I forgot!”

and departs in an evident hurry. Mrs. Quickly, however, despite her cunning, is mistaken about Anne's not loving Fenton, for Miss Page, while annoyed by her richer or more important suitors, Caius and Slender, each favoured by her different parents, has apparently kept her real feelings hitherto well to herself.

The next act and scene is at Page's house, introducing his wife with Falstaff's love-letter to her, which seems to amuse and to offend her at the same time. She exclaims to herself, as if suspecting what it contains :

“ What ! have I 'scaped love-letters in the holiday time of my beauty and am I now a subject for them ? Let me see ” ;

and she reads the following amusing mixture of wit, shrewdness, and affected sentimentality :

“ Ask me no reason why I love you ; for though love use reason as his physician, he admits him not for his counsellor. You are not young, no more am I ; go to, then, there's sympathy ; you are merry, so am I ; ha ! ha ! then there's more sympathy : you love sack and so do I ; would you desire better sympathy ? Let it suffice thee, Mistress Page (at the least if the love of soldier can suffice), that I love thee ; I will not say pity me, 'tis not a soldier-like phrase ; but I say, love me. By me,

“ Thine own true knight,
By day or night,
Or any kind of light,
With all his might
For thee to fight.
John Falstaff.”

Mrs. Page, in mingled mirth, surprise, and indigna-

tion, exclaims, referring to Scripture for some evil likeness or rival to Falstaff :

“What a Herod of Jewry is this?—O wicked, wicked world !”

Then, recalling her old admirer’s age and appearance to her disgusted mind, she proceeds :

“One that is well-nigh worn to pieces with age, to show himself a young gallant! . . . Why he hath not been thrice in my company! —What should I say to him?”

A comical idea now occurs to her half-angry, half-amused mind :

“Why, I’ll exhibit a bill in the Parliament for the putting down of fat men.”

Then becoming apparently more indignant, reflecting on the letter, she asks herself :

“How shall I be revenged on him? for revenged I will be.”

Mrs. Ford now enters, bringing a similar letter from Falstaff to herself, and exclaiming, after greeting :

“O Mistress Page, give me some counsel!”

Mrs. Page asks what is the matter, and Mrs. Ford, evidently quite confidential with her, says :

“There, read, read;—perceive how I might be knighted. I shall think the worse of fat men, as long as I have an eye to make difference of men’s liking. . . . How shall I be revenged on him? I think the best way were to entertain him with hope. . . . Did you ever hear the like?”

Mrs. Page, cordially agreeing with her in being half-angry and half-amused, rejoins :

“Letter for letter, but that the name of Page and Ford differs ! To thy great comfort in this mystery of ill opinions, here’s the twin brother of thy letter, but let thine inherit first, for I protest mine never shall.”

Then, ridiculing and suspecting old Falstaff’s conceited, amorous habits, she continues :

“I warrant he hath a thousand of these letters writ with blank space for different names (sure more), and these are of the second edition ; he will print them out of doubt ; for he cares not what he puts into the press, when he would put us two.”

Mrs. Ford then, comparing their two letters, exclaims :

“Why this is the very same, the very hand, the very words ; what doth he think of us ?”

Mrs. Page indignantly replies :

“Nay, I know not ; it makes me wrangle almost with mine own honesty, . . . for unless he knows some strain^x that I know not myself, he would never have boarded me in this fury.”

Mrs. Ford in the same anger rejoins :

“Boarding call you it ? I’ll be sure to keep him above deck.”

Falstaff evidently, despite his much vaunted shrewdness, was not only ignorant of the real characters of the two ladies but also of their thorough confidence in each other, which, considering his previous acquaintance with them, seems hardly consistent with

^x “Tendency.”—Staunton’s notes.

his means of information. Mrs. Page, equally angry, yet amused at the same time, suggests a scheme of mischief :

“Let’s be revenged on him, let’s appoint him a meeting ; give him a show of comfort in his suit, and lead him on with a fine-baited delay, ‘till he hath pawned his horses to mine host of the Garter.”

Mrs. Ford, as if rivalling her friend in their common indignation against Falstaff, cordially rejoins :

“Nay, I will consent to act any villainy against him. . . . O that my husband saw this letter ! it would give eternal food to his jealousy.”

Their husbands both approach, when Mrs. Page observes of her “good man” :

He’s as far from jealousy as I am from giving him cause, and that I hope is an unmeasurable distance” ;

while Mrs. Ford, whose suspicious husband is a thorough contrast to worthy Mr. Page, replies, perhaps sadly :

“You are the happier woman.”

Mrs. Page, now full of plots against Falstaff, exclaims :

“Let’s consult together against this knight,”

and they retire for the purpose. Page and Ford now enter, with Falstaff’s former followers, Pistol and Nym. These two worthies, offended with Falstaff, though

apparently not for long, have partly revealed the secret intrigues of their former patron to Page and Ford. The former, easy-going and good-natured, little heeds them, but the latter, irritable and suspicious by nature, is easily deceived and no match for the arts of Pistol, who bluntly says :

“Sir John affects thy wife.”

Ford, at first incredulous, replies :

“Why, sir, my wife is not young.”

Pistol persists, exaggerating Falstaff’s behaviour, rather like Leporello when describing the intrigues of his patron Don Giovanni with ladies of all sorts :

“He woos both high and low, both rich and poor. Both young and old, one with another, Ford. . . . Take heed, have open eye, for thieves do foot by night.”

Then, leaving it to his comrade Nym to inform Page, and evidently satisfied with having alarmed Ford, Pistol departs, saying to Page, as if recommending Nym :

“Believe it, Page, he speaks sense.”

Ford, catching the alarm, exclaims :

“I will be patient, I will find out this,”

while Nym, addressing Page with affected sincerity, bluntly says :

“I like not the humour of lying,”

and, alluding to Falstaff, says :

“He hath wronged me in some humours ; I should have borne the humoured letter to her, but I have a sword, and it shall bite upon my necessity. He loves your wife ; there’s the short and the long. My name is Corporal Nym. I speak and I avouch.”

Then firmly repeating his words, as if anxious to convince the somewhat incredulous Page, the informer adds :

“ ‘Tis true—my name is Nym and Falstaff loves your wife, . . . adieu !”

Nym departs, without making much impression on the easy-going Mr. Page, but Ford, already excited, exclaims :

“I will seek out Falstaff !”

and while Page declares he will not believe such information, their two wives enter. Page merely asks his wife :

“How now, Meg ?

while Mrs. Ford, apparently observing some discontent in her good man, affectionately asks :

“How now, sweet Frank ? why art thou melancholy ?”

and Ford petulantly answers, partly revealing his jealousy :

“Melancholy ! I am not melancholy. Get you home, go !”

Mrs. Ford, evidently observing him and now a little suspicious herself, retorts :

“ Faith, thou hast some crotchets in thy head now. Will you go, Mistress Page ? ”

The latter replies :

“ Have with you, ”

then says to her husband :

“ You’ll come to dinner, George ? ”

He makes no answer, when she, perceiving Mrs. Quickly approach, says aside to Mrs. Ford :

“ Look who comes yonder : she shall be our messenger to this paltry knight.”

Mrs. Ford, in full agreement, readily rejoins :

“ Trust me, I thought on her ; she’ll fit it.”

Mrs. Quickly now appears, asking after Anne Page. The two ladies ask her to go with them and see Anne, and the three depart, leaving Ford and Page alone together. Each inquires of the other what he has heard from the informers, and Ford asks if Page thinks there is truth in them, and the other replies he does not think so, adding that those accusing Falstaff

“ are a yoke of his discarded men ; very rogues, now that they be out of service.”

Ford was not aware of this, yet, always of a jealous or suspicious nature, replies :

“I like it never the better for that,”

and asks if Falstaff is now at the Garter Inn. Page replies he is, and adds with merry good humour, which implies thorough confidence in his wife :

“If he should intend this voyage toward my wife, I would turn her loose to him, and what he gets more of her than sharp words, let it lie on my head.”

Ford takes a very different view of their case, exclaiming :

“A man may be too confident ; I would have nothing lie on my head. I cannot be thus satisfied.”

The host of the Garter now appears, and Page, who knows him well, exclaims to Ford :

“Look where my ranting host of the Garter comes ; there is either liquor in his pate, or money in his purse, when he looks so merrily. How now, mine host ? ”

This joyous host, followed by old Shallow, enters ; the former addresses Shallow in merry raillery :

“How now, bully-rook ? ¹ Thou ’rt a gentleman. Cavalero-justice, I say.”

Shallow, after greeting, asks Page to come with them, saying temptingly :

“We have sport in hand” ;

¹ “Jolly dog.”—Staunton’s notes.

and then explains that

“there is a fray to be fought between Sir Hugh, the Welsh priest, and Caius, the French doctor.”

Ford now calls the host aside, while Shallow, anticipating the coming duel with an interest if not pleasure more like a lively youth than an old magistrate, asks Page to come and see it with him, exclaiming in evident glee :

“ My merry host hath had the measuring of their weapons, and I think hath appointed them contrary places, for, believe me, I hear the parson is no jester. Hark, I will tell you what our sport shall be.”

He does not, however, explain more at this time, but the host now asks Ford if he has anything to say against Falstaff, whom he professionally calls his “guest-cavalier.” Ford replies :

“ None, I protest, but I’ll give you a pottle of burnt sack to give me recourse to him and tell him my name is Brook ”;

then, as if wishing to prevent any suspicion or alarm in the host’s mind, he quickly adds :

“ Only for a jest.”

The merry host rejoins, quite believing him :

“ My hand, bully, thou shalt have egress and regress; said I well? and thy name shall be Brook.”

Then, as if thinking Falstaff may be amused by Ford’s intended visit, adds :

“ It is a merry knight,”

and asks Shallow and Page to go with him, evidently to the scene of the duel. They agree, Page observing :

“I have heard the Frenchman hath good skill in his rapier.”

This report was likely true, Frenchmen then as now being noted throughout the civilised world for their skill and address in fencing, but old Shallow, who has doubtless seen better days and likes to recall them, rather proudly replies, as if a judge in the science :

“Tut, sir, I could have told you more. In these times you stand on distance, your passes, stoccadoes, and I know not what; 'tis the heart, Master Page, 'tis here, 'tis here !”

Then, either recalling or inventing some former triumphs of his own, and knowing none of his hearers wish to contradict him, he declares :

“I have seen the time, with my long sword, I would have made you four tall fellows skip like rats.”

None of the four present replies, though likely laughing to themselves at the old boaster, whom they probably think no longer capable of either reasoning or fighting. All depart except Ford, while Page, a thorough man of peace both at home and abroad, exclaims about the coming duel, showing more good sense than any of them :

“I had rather hear them scold than fight.”

Ford, left alone, indulges in a jealous soliloquy, which for the present at least he wishes none to hear,

yet which explains his present feelings and foretells his future conduct :

“ Though Page be a secure fool and stands so firmly on his wife’s fealty, yet I cannot put off my opinion so easily ”;

then begins, as it were, to encourage or arouse his own suspicions about his wife and Falstaff :

“ She was in his company at Page’s house, and what they made ¹ there I know not. Well, I will look further into ‘t, and I have a disguise to sound Falstaff ; if I find her honest, I lose not my labour ; if she be otherwise, ‘tis labour well bestowed.”

The next scene is at the Garter Inn, where Falstaff and his follower, Pistol, have a curious talk together. This last worthy seems to now rather repent having disobeyed, if not betrayed, his patron, and, likely not for the first time, wants to borrow money from him. Falstaff with scornful contempt says emphatically :

“ I will not lend thee a penny.”

Pistol, as if in pretended desperation, replies boldly :

“ Why, then the world’s mine oyster,
Which I with sword will open.”

Falstaff firmly repeats :

“ Not a penny,”

and then administers a reproachful lecture to his troublesome follower, in whom, however, he has apparently not lost all confidence, or perhaps thinks

• “ Did.”—Staunton’s notes.

he has nothing serious to fear from this disreputable, if not unscrupulous, adherent. He then addresses him in a style of reproach which sounds almost comic, though uttered quite in earnest :

“I have been content, sir, you should lay my countenance to pawn ; I have grated upon my good friends for three reprieves for you and your coach-fellow, Nym ; or else you had looked through the grate, like a geminy of baboons.”

Falstaff’s allusion to saving Nym and Pistol from looking like dangerous monkeys confined behind bars is not again mentioned, but likely was true, as he tells a further instance of his protecting them from deserved punishment, owning that he himself was to blame

“for swearing to gentlemen, my friends, you were good soldiers and tall fellows, and when Mistress Bridget lost the handle of her fan, I took’t upon mine honour thou hadst it not.”

Pistol, who can remember as well as Falstaff, naturally asks in reply :

“Didst thou not share ? hadst not thou fifteen pence ?”

Falstaff with admirable effrontery retorts :

“Reason, you rogue, reason ! Think’st thou I’ll endanger my soul *gratis* ?”

Then, knowing his power over Pistol and that such a scamp will hardly be trusted in any active service, Falstaff scornfully pretends to dismiss him from his, and proceeds :

“At a word, hang no more about me ; I am no gibbet for you, go !”

Then, advising Pistol to pursue in future his knaveries with a knife or dagger amid a crowd of people in Pickt-hatch, a notorious low quarter in London,¹ Falstaff scolds him for previous disobedience, which has evidently been rankling in his mind ever since :

“ You’ll not bear a letter for me, you rogue ! you stand upon your honour ! Why, thou unconfinable baseness, it is as much as I can do to keep the terms of my honour precise.”

Then, favourably comparing himself to his more disreputable-looking follower, he continues :

“ I, I, I myself, sometimes leaving the fear of heaven on the left hand and hiding mine honour in my necessity, am fain to shuffle, to hedge, and to lurch, and yet you, rogue, will ensconce your rags, your cat-a-mountain looks, your red lattice² phrases, and your bold-beating oaths under the shelter of your honour.”

He then brings Pistol to the point again :

“ You will not do it, you !”

Pistol, as if partly overcome by his patron’s reproaches, and perhaps fearing for himself if he offends him, replies :

“ I do relent,”³

and asks :

“ What would thou more of me ?”

Before Falstaff answers, Mrs. Quickly calls to see him, and is admitted. This artful, intriguing woman

¹ Staunton’s notes. ² Ale-house expressions.—*Ibid.*

³ “ Repent.”—*Ibid.*

is far more fitted to deal with the unscrupulous, yet vain old rogue Falstaff than are any of his male followers. She is now cleverly playing the part of negotiator between the two “merry wives” and Sir John, and well knows how to perform it. After stating she is a servant of Dr. Caius, merely naming Mrs. Ford, she asks Falstaff to come aside, as if distrusting Pistol and Falstaff’s page, Robin. But Falstaff, evidently fearing neither, confidently says to the suspicious Mrs. Quickly :

“I warrant thee nobody hears,”

adding, to reassure her :

“Mine own people, mine own people.”

The woman, who can assume piety and good-will whenever she pleases, meekly replies :

“Are they so? Heaven bless them and make them his servants.”

Falstaff, his interest being roused at the mere mention of Mrs. Ford, asks :

“Well, Mistress Ford, what of her?”

Mrs. Quickly slyly answers, pretending to be a little shocked and amused at the same time :

“Why, sir, she’s a good creature. Lord! Lord! your worship’s a wanton.”

Then, relapsing into assumed propriety, she exclaims :

“Well, heaven forgive you and all of us, I pray!”

Falstaff, becoming impatient, eagerly exclaims :

“ Mistress Ford—come, Mistress Ford.”

Mrs. Quickly, seeing his anxiety, cunningly proceeds to invent and describe Mrs. Ford’s liking for the old knight :

“ Marry, this is the short and the long of it; you have brought her into such a canaries,¹ as ’tis wonderful. The best courtier of them all when the Court lay at Windsor could never have brought her to such a canary, yet there has been knights, and lords and gentlemen with their coaches, I warrant you, coach after coach, letter after letter, gift after gift, smelling so sweetly (all musk), and so rushing I warrant you in silver and gold and in such alligant terms ; and in such wine and sugar of the best and the fairest that would have won any woman’s heart ; and I warrant you, they could never get an eye-wink of her.”

Then, vindicating her own virtue in defiance of all temptation, she proceeds :

“ I had myself twenty angels given me this morning, but I defy all angels (in any such sort, as they say), but in the way of honesty . . . and yet there has been earls, nay, which is more, pensioners,² but I warrant you all is one with her.”

Falstaff, evidently believing all this indirect flattery and nonsense, becomes the more eager and asks :

“ But what says she to me ? Be brief, my good she-Mercury.”

Here Falstaff, like his followers, quotes classic history

¹ “ Quandary.”—Staunton’s notes.

² “ Gentlemen of the band of Pensioners, whose duty it was to be in immediate attendance on the sovereign, and whose splendid uniform might well induce Mrs. Quickly to rank them above the magnates of the Court.”—Ibid.

when associating Mrs. Quickly with Mercury, the messenger god of Jupiter, of which allusion she naturally takes no notice, and probably did not understand. She makes no reply to this classical compliment, but, always ready with her answer, and likely well primed by Mrs. Ford about what to say, and how to say it, replies :

“Marry, she hath received your letter, for the which she thanks you a thousand times, and she gives you to notify that her husband will be absent from his house between ten and eleven . . . Alas, the sweet woman leads an ill life with him; he’s a very jealous man.”

Falstaff, completely taken in and believing all she says, repeats her words :

“Ten and eleven, woman; commend me to her, I will not fail her.”

Mrs. Quickly, probably much gratified at her success so far, exclaims :

“Why, you say well,”

and then in due course introduces the name of Mrs. Page, saying :

“But I have another messenger to your worship. Mistress Page hath her hearty commendations to you, too,—and let me tell you in your ear, she’s as fartuous a civil modest wife, and one, I tell you, that will not miss you morning nor evening prayer, as any is in Windsor, whoe’er be the other, and she bade me tell your worship that her husband is seldom from home, but she hopes there will come a time.”

Then, drawing upon her own lively imagination, the flattering old intriguer adds :

"I never knew a woman so dote upon a man; surely, I think you have charms, la, yes, in truth."

Falstaff, whose vanity, despite occasional shrewdness, seldom makes him insensible to the grossest personal flattery, replies, evidently pleased :

"Not I, I assure thee; setting the attraction of my good parts aside, I have no other charms."

He then asks an important, yet amusing question, which shows his present confidence in Mrs. Quickly :

"Has Ford's wife and Page's wife acquainted each other how they love me?"

Mrs. Quickly, seeing how readily Falstaff believes her, replies with sly merriment and probably laughing at him all the time :

"That were a jest indeed!—they have not so little grace, I hope—that were a trick indeed,"

and she proceeds with more plots and exaggerations :

"But Mistress Page would desire you to send her your little page of all loves;¹ her husband has a marvellous infection to the little page, and truly, Master Page is an honest man. Never a wife in Windsor leads a better life than she does, do what she will, say what she will; take all, pay all, go to bed when she list, all is as she will; and truly she deserves it; for if there be a kind woman in Windsor, she is one. You must send her your page, no remedy."

Falstaff, perhaps surprised, replies, rather hesitating :

"Why, so I will,"

¹ "For love's sake."—Staunton's notes.

and Mrs. Quickly eagerly presses him :

“Nay, but do so then, and look you, he may come and go between you both.”

Then, assuming a high moral tone, she proceeds :

“And the boy never need to understand anything, for 'tis not good that children should know any wickedness; old folks, you know, have discretion, as they say, and know the world.”

Falstaff, completely deceived by her cunning and artifice, replies :

“Fare thee well, commend me to them both; there's my purse, I am yet thy debtor.”

He then sends off his page Robin with Mrs. Quickly. This lad says nothing here, and throughout does not seem a very sharp or intelligent sample of his age, despite association with such a witty personage as Falstaff, or such bullies and sharpers as Messrs. Pistol and Co. Shakespeare merely makes Robin act like a machine or tool, obeying—or trying to obey—their all, and making little comment. Falstaff exclaims, as Mrs. Quickly and Robin go out, leaving him alone with Pistol, as if bewildered by the woman's cunning :

“This news distracts me.”

Pistol, who often alludes to classic ideas, which it seems strange that such a man would know, declares that she is one of Cupid's carriers, and, apparently excited by anything like tricks or successful roguery, eagerly exclaims, as if to encourage his rather perplexed old patron :

"Clap on more sails, pursue! up with your fights; ¹ give fire! she is my prize, or ocean whelm them all."

With these cheerful, encouraging words, Pistol departs, and Falstaff, when alone, reveals that singular mixture of unscrupulous cunning and almost childish personal vanity which forms his extraordinary character. He speaks indulgently to and of himself, as if he were his own spoiled child :

"Say'st thou so, old Jack? Go thy ways; I'll make more of thine old body than I have done."

He then asks himself, in a spirit of sincere yet comic vanity :

"Will they yet look after thee? Wilt thou, after the expense of so much money, be now a gainer? Good body, I thank thee: let them say 'tis grossly done; so it be fairly done, no matter."

His follower Bardolph, comrade of Pistol, like him, yet perhaps more intemperate and less boastful, now enters, announcing Ford disguised as Mr. Brook, who, wishing to speak with Falstaff, sends him a present of a morning's draught of sack, Sir John's well-known favourite beverage. Falstaff bids Bardolph admit him, and probably after tasting the sack, when by himself, makes a pun on Brook's name :

"Such Brooks are welcome to me that o'erflow such liquor."

Then, as if already inspirited by it, he confidently exclaims :

¹ "The Waste-clothes that hang round about the ship in a fight to hinder the men from being seen by the enemy."—Staunton's notes.

“Ah! ha! Mistress Ford and Mistress Page, have I encompassed you? go to, *via!*”

Ford now enters, introduced by Bardolph, who withdraws, leaving the two together, and Ford, after a brief greeting, begins :

“Sir, I am a gentleman that have spent much; my name is Brook.”

Falstaff, apparently propitiated by the sack, graciously replies :

“Good Master Brook, I desire more acquaintance of you,”

and Ford, with assumed frankness, says :

“Good Sir John, I sue for yours, not to charge you, for I must let you understand, I think myself in better plight for a lender than you are, the which hath something emboldened me to this unseasoned intrusion; for they say if money go before, all ways do lie open.”

Falstaff, apparently pleased and hopeful at the idea of receiving more presents, replies encouragingly :

“Money is a good soldier, sir, and will on.”

Ford, finding Falstaff as easy to deal with as he could have expected, rejoins cheerfully :

“Troth, and I have a bag of money here troubles me; if you will help me to bear it, Sir John, take half or all for easing me of the carriage.”

Falstaff, rather surprised though gratified at such unexpected words, replies with some caution :

“Sir, I know not how I may deserve to be your porter.”

Ford says he will tell him, and the other bids him proceed. Ford then, after complimenting Sir John on his being a scholar of whom he has heard without knowing him, confesses that he is in love with Mrs. Ford, that he has followed her and made her many presents, but all without success, and ends his lamentation by repeating the lines :

“ Love like a shadow flies, when substance love pursues ;
Pursuing that that flies, and flying what pursues.”

Falstaff, calmly listening, asks practically :

“ Have you received no promise of satisfaction at her hands ? ”

Ford :

“ Never,”

and Falstaff leisurely proceeds :

“ Have you importuned her to such a purpose ? ”

Ford again replies :

“ Never,”

and Falstaff further asks him the somewhat trying question :

“ Of what quality was your love then ? ”

Ford makes a singular, yet explanatory reply :

“ Like a fair house built upon another man’s ground, so that I have lost my edifice, by mistaking the place where I erected it.”

Falstaff, wishing to understand him thoroughly, while apparently inclined to believe all he says, naturally asks :

“To what purpose have you unfolded this to me ? ”

Ford then vaguely hints that Mrs. Ford is reported no better than she should be, and thus continues :

“Now, Sir John, here is the heart of my purpose” ;

he then tries a little personal flattery, which nearly always deceives Falstaff, no matter by whom it is uttered :

“You are a gentleman of excellent breeding, admirable discourse, and of great admittance,¹ generally allowed for your many warlike, court-like, and learned preparations.”

Falstaff, always delighted with compliments, here exclaims, with affected modesty :

“O, sir ! ”

and Ford, seeing the impression he makes, continues with increased confidence in the same strain :

“Believe it, for you know it.”

Then, becoming practical, in the most pleasing way, he adds enthusiastically :

“There is money, spend it, spend it; spend more, spend all I have, only give me so much of your time in exchange for it, as

¹ “Fashion.”—Staunton’s notes,

to lay an amiable siege to the honesty of this Ford's wife ; use your art of wooing, win her to consent to you ; if any man may, you may as soon as any."

Falstaff, though highly gratified, is yet rather surprised, and shrewdly asks and observes, before final agreement :

"Would it apply well to the vehemency of your affection, that I should win what you would enjoy? Methinks you prescribe to yourself very preposterously."¹

Ford, more and more confident in his being able to deceive Falstaff, eagerly rejoins :

"O, understand my drift! she stands so securely on the excellency of her honour, that the folly of my soul does not present itself ; she is too bright to be looked against. Now could I come to her with any detection in my hand, my desires had instance and argument to commend themselves, I could drive her then from the ward² of her purity, her reputation, her marriage vow, and a thousand other defences, which are now too strongly embattled against me. What say you to't, Sir John?"

Falstaff, now quite won over by Ford's words, convinced of his sincerity, and thoroughly gratified by his flattery, warmly rejoins, though with a shrewd eye to the main chance, and resolved that everything should be in proper order :

"Master Brook, I will first make bold with your money, next give me your hand, and last, as I am a gentleman, you shall, if you will, enjoy Ford's wife."

¹ "Misplacedly."—Staunton's notes.

² "Guard."—Ibid.

Ford, with pretended delight, eagerly exclaims :

“Want no money, Sir John, you shall want none.”

Falstaff, with his usual wit, and evidently feeling quite secure, retorts :

“Want no Mistress Ford, Master Brook, you shall want none,”

and then imparts most valuable but altogether unexpected information to the disguised, jealous husband :

“I shall be with her (I may tell you) by her own appointment”;

then, alluding to Mrs. Quickly, adds :

“Even as you came in to me, her assistant or go-between parted from me : I say, I shall be with her between ten and eleven, for at that time the jealous rascally knave, her husband, will be forth. Come to me at night, you shall know how I speed.”

Ford, amazed, astounded, and with all his worst suspicions aroused, exclaims in mingled rage and astonishment :

“I am blest in your acquaintance”;

then asks, with almost frantic eagerness and curiosity :

“Do you know Ford, sir?”

Falstaff replies with supreme and utter contempt :

“Hang him, poor knave ! I know him not, yet I wrong him to call him poor ; they say the jealous knave hath masses of money, for the which his wife seems to me well-favoured. I will use her as the key of the rogue’s coffer ; and there’s my harvest home.”

Ford, almost beside himself with suppressed fury, exclaims, in a way which Falstaff quite misunderstands :

“ I would you knew Ford, sir, that you might avoid him if you saw him.”

Falstaff, as if boasting of his own bodily as well as mental superiority over his supposed dupe, scornfully replies, with unmitigated contempt :

“ Hang him, mechanical salt-butter rogue ! I will stare him out of his wits, I will awe him with my cudgel, . . . Master Brook, thou shalt know I will predominate over the peasant . . . Come to me soon at night . . . Ford’s a knave and I will aggravate his style; thou, Master Brook, shalt know him for knave . . . come to me soon at night ”;

and with these words Falstaff departs, leaving Ford alone, whose worst suspicions about his wife now seem on the point of being realised. He exclaims in perplexed, vehement, and rather incoherent rage, hardly able to fully comprehend all he has heard :

“ What a ~~dead~~ Epicurean rascal is this !—My heart is ready to crack with impatience. Who says this is improvident jealousy ? My wife has sent to him, the hour is fixed, the match is made.”

Then, in the midst of his excitement, he apparently recalls his hitherto happy married life by asking himself :

“ Would any man have thought this ? See the hell of having a false woman : my coffers ransacked, my reputation gnawn at.”

After more bitter fretting he remembers his unsus-

picious friend Page with sincere yet sympathetic contempt, exclaiming :

“Page is an ass, a secure ass ; he will trust his wife, he will not be jealous.”

Ford then betrays his naturally jealous temper, roused now almost to frenzy by Falstaff’s cunning and effrontery. He imagines various persons alike exposed to temptations, each peculiarly trying to their different natures, and in this excitement he exclaims, with bitter and distinguishing emphasis :

“I will rather trust a Fleming with my butter, parson Hugh, the Welshman, with my cheese, an Irishman with my aqua-vitæ bottle, or a thief to walk my ambling gelding, than my wife with herself.”

Shakespeare rarely mentions the Irish in any of his plays, but in this instance likely recalls some intemperate Irish people he knew or heard of in London, as he was certainly never in Ireland. Ford, quite believing Falstaff’s intimations, proceeds, furious indeed, yet trying to congratulate himself on what he thinks is his own superior intelligence :

“Heaven be praised for my jealousy ! Eleven o’clock the hour : I will prevent this, detect my wife, be revenged on Falstaff, and laugh at Page. I will about it ; better three hours too soon than a minute too late.”

Then, shocked and enraged, he departs, exclaiming,

“Fie, fie, fie !”

The next scene, in Windsor Park, introduces Caius

and his servant Rugby. It may seem strange that this excitable Frenchman, who is usually in a passion during the whole play, should have this thoroughly Roman name. The French physician resembles neither ancient Greeks nor Romans. He is a thorough Frenchman in ways and habits, though, perhaps, an exaggerated specimen. His broken English is so natural and consistent that Shakespeare might seem to have copied it from certain Frenchmen of his acquaintance. It is chiefly on the stage, or at a good public reading, that his wonderfully fluent distortion of English can be well understood or appreciated. He is now fully prepared for his duel with Evans, impatiently asking Rugby the time, and hearing it is past the hour appointed, irritably exclaims :

“ By gar, he has save his soul, dat he is no come ; he has pray his Pible vell, dat he is no come ; by gar, Jack Rugby, he is dead already, if he be come.”

Rugby, perhaps wishing to flatter his master on his fencing skill, replies :

“ He is wise, sir ; he knew your worship would kill him if he came.”

Caius, excited, now boastfully exclaims to his apparently timid servant :

“ Take your rapier, Jack, I will tell you how I will kill him.”

Rugby, evidently not liking to be practised upon, answers :

“ Alas, sir ! I cannot fence,”

but the eager Frenchman persists, saying angrily :

“Villainy ! take your rapier,”

but Rugby is spared making a reply by the appearance of the host, Shallow, Slender, and Page. These all greet the fiery Caius, who then asks them :

“Vat be all you one, two, tree, four come for ?”

The lively host of the Garter, who seems or pretends to know all about fencing, replies :

“To see thee fight, to see thee foin,¹ to see thee traverse, to see thee here, to see thee there, to see thee pass thy punto, thy stock, thy revenge, thy distance.”

As if excited by his own words, or wishing to irritate Caius by pretending that his absent foe is lying vanquished before him, he jeeringly asks :

“Is he dead, my Ethiopian ? Is he dead, my Francisco ? ha, bully !”

Then, as if invoking the Greek god of medicine and a celebrated classic physician :

“What says my Esculapius ? my Galen ? . . . is he dead ?”

Caius, suspecting that Parson Evans is afraid to meet him, exclaims :

“By gar, he is de coward Jack priest of de world, he is not show his face.”

¹ “Make attempt.”—Staunton’s notes.

The host continues to praise or encourage Caius, perhaps partly in joke, calling him Hector of Greece, while the impatient Frenchman exclaims to all around :

“ I pray you bear witness, that me have stay six or seven, two, tree hours for him, and he is no come.”

Shallow now ventures on a little witticism, saying, to pacify Dr. Caius :

“ He is the wiser man, master doctor ; he is a curer of souls, and you a curer of bodies ; if you should fight you go against the hair of your professions, is it not true, Master Page ? ”

Page, as if amused at Shallow and wishing to hear him boast of his former real or supposed exploits, replies :

“ Master Shallow, you have yourself been a great fighter, though now a man of peace.”

Shallow proudly tries to vindicate, or likely exaggerate his former martial reputation, exclaiming :

“ Bodykins, Master Page, though I now be old and of the peace, if I see a sword out, my finger itches to make one ” ;

then, as if trying to vindicate himself at the expense of the two intending duellists, the lively old gentleman proceeds :

“ Though we are justices and doctors and churchmen, Master Page, we have some salt of youth in us ; we are the sons of women, Master Page ! ”

To this undeniable fact, Page answers—

“ ’Tis true,”

and Shallow, really thinking it his duty to make peace between the combatants, continues :

“ Master Doctor Caius, I am come to fetch you home. I am sworn of the peace : you have showed yourself a wise physician, and Sir Hugh hath shown himself a wise and patient churchman. You must go with me, master doctor.”

But here the merry host, who apparently likes to irritate the Frenchman, interposes, saying to Shallow :

“ Pardon, guest justice,”

then to Caius :

“ A word, Monsieur Mock-water,”

and explains to Caius, who asks what he means, that the word signifies valour ; Caius, always boasting of this quality, exclaims :

“ By gar, then I have as much mock-vater as de Englishman,”

and then, as if suddenly believing Parson Evans to be a coward, he adds :

“ Scurvy jack-dog priest ! by gar, me vill cut his ears.”

The host replies, apparently liking to provoke him further :

“ He will clapper-claw thee tightly, bully ! ”

Caius asks :

“Clapper-de-claw ! vat is dat ?”

and the host replies :

“That is, he will make thee amends,”

and he continues to rather excite Caius ; when addressing the others, he advises them to go through the town to Frogmore, saying that Evans is there, adding :

“See what humour he is in and I will bring the doctor about by the fields.”

The three—Shallow, Page, and Slender—agree and depart, leaving Caius and the host together. The former then exclaims in his vehement broken English :

“By gar, me vill kill de priest, for he speak for a jack-an-ape to Anne Page.”

The lively host, secretly laughing at Caius though seeming to befriend him, replies, alluding to Evans :

“Let him die ! but first sheathe thy impatience, throw cold water on thy choler, go about the fields with me through Frogmore ; I will bring thee where Mistress Anne Page is at a farm-house a-feasting and thou shalt woo her . . . Said I well ?”

Caius, delighted with the apparently friendly host, rejoins in practical gratitude :

“By gar, me tank you vor dat : by gar, I love you, and I shall

procure you de good guest, de earl, de knight, de lords, de gentlemen, my patients.”

The host, as if knowing that Caius is an imperfect English scholar, replies :

“For the which I will be thy adversary toward Anne Page, said I well?”

and the deceived doctor replies :

“By gar, 'tis good ; vell said.”

The gay host exclaims :

“Let us wag, then,”

and Caius, summoning his frightened servant, says :

“Come at my heels, Jack Rugby,”

and the three depart for the scene of the expected duel.

The next scene, beginning the third act, is in a field near Frogmore. Sir Hugh Evans, with Slender's servant, Simple, whose name indicates his character, are together, awaiting Dr. Caius, while Evans is evidently frightened at the expected contest, and expresses his nervousness in his usual Welsh accent :

“Pless my soul ! how full of cholers I am, and tremping of mind ! —I shall be glad if he have deceived me. How melancholies I am ! . . . Pless my soul ” ;

and trying to rouse his spirits he begins to sing ¹ :

¹ “This couplet, slightly varied by Sir Hugh's trepidation, is from a charming little pastoral once thought to be Shakespeare's and

“ To shallow rivers, to whose falls
 Melodious pirds sing madrigals :
 There will we make our peds of roses,
 And a thousand fragrant posies.
 To shallow—— ”

He breaks down here, exclaiming, evidently from his heart :

“ Mercy on me ! I have a great disposition to cry.”

Still trying to rouse himself, he continues his ditty :

“ Melodious pirds sing madrigals :—
 When as I sat in Pabylon,
 And a thousand vagram posies.
 To shallow—— ”

Here Simple interrupts, thinking he sees the foe coming. Evans, trying to keep up appearances, exclaims :

“ He's welcome,”

then sings again :

“ To shallow rivers, to whose falls ” ;

and again breaks off, exclaiming :

“ Heaven prosper the right,”

and asking Simple :

“ What weapons is he ? ”

as such inserted in his ‘Passionate Pilgrim,’ but which in ‘England’s Helicon’ and by Isaac Walton in his ‘Complete Angler’ is attributed to Marlowe.”—Staunton’s notes.

Simple answers that the comers are his master, Slender, and another gentleman, meaning Page, whom he apparently does not at once recognise, while Evans exclaims to Simple, as if nervous :

“Pray you give me my gown, or else keep it in your arms.”

The three men approach, and Shallow says to Evans :

“How now, master parson? Good morrow, good Sir Hugh.”

Then, perhaps thinking that Evans was reading or studying something in the open air, proceeds :

“Keep a gamester from the dice, and a good student from his book, and it is wonderful.”

Slender often, in an absent fit, exclaims, addressing no one :

“O sweet Anne Page!”

This exclamation the silly dreamy young man frequently utters during the play without any addition, his mind apparently often reverting to Miss Page, who cares nothing about him. He often exclaims thus at intervals, till readers may be rather wearied by so much repetition, but no one in the play seems to notice it. On this occasion, Evans, the unwilling duellist, very different from the fiery Frenchman, greets Shallow, Slender, and Page, in evident relief

at their coming to the expected scene of strife, thankfully exclaiming :

“Pless you from his mercy’s sake, all of you.

Shallow, surprised, or perhaps inclined to ridicule the apparently warlike clergyman, asks in wonder :

“What! the sword and the word! Do you study them both, master parson?”

Page in the same spirit exclaims :

“And youthful still in your doublet and hose, this raw rheumatic day!”

Evans perhaps sadly replies :

“There is reason and cause for it.”

Shallow and Page then proceed to extol Dr. Caius as “the renowned French physician,” whom Evans in his absence deprecates, exclaiming :

“He has no more knowledge in Hippocrates and Galen¹—and he is a knave besides, a cowardly knave, as you would desire to be acquainted withal.”

Then Page naturally observes :

“I warrant you, he’s the man should fight with him,”

while the absent or thoughtful Slender repeats :

“O sweet Anne Page!”

¹ “Two celebrated Greek and Roman physicians.”—Lemprière’s Classical Dictionary.

But Caius, Rugby, and the host now appear, and Shallow says :

“Keep them asunder, here comes Dr. Caius.”

Shallow and Page both try to keep the peace, the latter saying to Evans :

“Nay, good master parson, keep in your weapon,”

while Shallow says to Caius :

“So do you, good master doctor.”

The host, as usual merry and joking, exclaims :

“Disarm them and let them question, let them keep their limbs whole”;

then adds scornfully :

“And hack our English,”

alluding to their Welsh and French accents, both of which Shakespeare evidently knows well, and likes to describe. When Caius and Evans meet, the former again calls him a coward, when, likely to his surprise, Evans whispers or says to him aside :

“Pray you, let us not be laughing-stogs to other men’s humours ; I desire you in friendship and I will one way or other make you amends.”

Then, pretending to be in a rage before the others, Evans insults Caius for his late arrival on the duelling

ground, while Caius, as if to vindicate his courage, appeals to the host and to Rugby, exclaiming :

“ *Diable !* Have I not stay for him to kill him ? Have I not, at de place I did appoint ? ”

Evans, equally anxious to vindicate his own courage, exclaims :

“ As I am a Christian soul, now look you, this is the place appointed ; I'll be judged by mine host of the Garter.”

To these appeals from parson and doctor, the joking, perhaps sneering, host replies :

“ Peace, I say ! Guallia and Gaul, French and Welsh ; soul curer and body curer.”

Caius, amused or interested at these words, exclaims :

“ Ay, dat is ver good ! excellent ! ”

Then the shrewd host astonishes all, except perhaps the dreamy Slender, by making an important explanation, and exclaims, with real or assumed solemnity and self-importance :

“ Peace, I say, hear mine host of the Garter. Am I politic, am I subtle ? am I a Machiavel ? ”

This allusion to the crafty Italian politician, who was born nearly a century before the poet, could only have interested a learned minority among a London theatrical audience. His works, however, were evidently well known to Shakespeare, who makes

even Richard III. allude to this “murderous” writer with dangerous admiration.¹ But it is indeed unlikely that many, if any, English hotel-keepers in Shakespeare’s time would have known about Machiavel’s abilities or character. The host, however, having evidently secured attentive listeners, proceeds to pacify as well as to flatter or praise both Caius and Evans, exclaiming to each in turn :

“Shall I lose my doctor? No, he gives me the potions and the motions. Shall I lose my parson? my priest? my Sir Hugh? No, he gives me the proverbs and the no-verbs.”

Then to Caius he says :

“Give me thy hand terrestrial; so”;

then to Evans :

“Give me thy hand celestial; so.”

Holding each by the hand, after these allusions to their separate professions, the shrewd host makes an important confession, but evidently fears none of his hearers. Addressing the parson and doctor alike, he says :

“Boys of art, I have deceived you both; I have directed you to wrong places; your hearts are mighty, your skins are whole.”

Then, remembering his own professional interests, he sensibly adds :

“and let burnt sack be the issue. Come, lay their swords to pawn.”

¹ See “Henry VI.,” Act III., Scene 2.

Then says probably to Slender :

“Follow me, lad of peace ; follow, follow, follow.”

Shallow, surprised yet pleased with this lively peace-maker, exclaims :

“Trust me, a mad host,”

yet, following his advice, adds to the rest :

“Follow, gentlemen, follow,”

while the absent and brooding Slender, repeating his usual sentence :

“O sweet Anne Page !”

which no one notices, goes off with Shallow, Page, and the host, leaving the two reconciled foes together, who, after their surprise, are both angry, or pretend to be, with the knowing, genial host. Caius first exclaims :

“Ha ! do I perceive dat ? Have you make-a de sot of us ? ha ! ha !”

and Evans says :

“This is well, he has made us his vlouting-stog. I desire you that we may be friends and let us knog our prains together, to be revenge on this same scall, scurvy, cogging companion, the host of the Garter.”

Caius assents, exclaiming :

“By gar, vit all my heart ; he promise to bring me vere is Anne Page ; by gar, he deceive me too.”

Evans rejoins with a new threat towards the absent host, which probably he has little idea of carrying out :

“Well, I will smite his noddles—pray you, follow,”

and they depart together, quite pacified.

The next scene is in a street at Windsor, where Mrs. Page and Falstaff’s page, Robin, are together. This lad, though serving such a witty, extraordinary master, seems neither as amusing nor as intelligent as might have been expected, considering his opportunities of being both. Shakespeare says very little of him, and the lad himself seems more indifferent to Falstaff than is quite natural. In real life he would likely have either ridiculed or greatly admired such a singular, eccentric master. Mrs. Page now addresses Robin as if he were about entering her service, but it is not clear if the lad ever leaves Falstaff altogether. She says in evident good-humour, perhaps as if the boy was rather officious :

“Nay, keep your way, little gallant; you were wont to be a follower, but now you are a leader: whether had you rather lead mine eyes, or eye your master’s heels?”

Robin replies, with more spirit than he ever showed before, or after :

“I had rather forsooth go before you like a man, than follow him like a dwarf.”

Mrs. Page rejoins merrily :

“O you are a flattering boy, now I see you’ll be a courtier.”

Robin makes no reply, as Ford now appears, who, completely absorbed by his suspicions, asks where she is going, and hears she goes to see his wife. Mrs. Page asks if the latter is at home, and Ford replies, with suppressed bitterness and jealousy :

“Ay, and as idle as she may hang together, for want of company,”

adding, with morose sarcasm :

“I think if your husbands were dead, you two would marry.”

Mrs. Page replies with provoking cheerfulness :

“Be sure of that,—two other husbands.”

Ford asks about the boy, either in ridicule or as a compliment :

“Where had you this pretty weathercock?”

Mrs. Page, who apparently likes to tease and annoy Ford, replies, though well knowing Robin is Falstaff’s page :

“I cannot tell what the dickens his name is my husband had him of ; what do you call your knight’s name, sirrah?”

Robin merely names Sir John Falstaff, which Ford repeats as if surprised, while Mrs. Page, probably laughing to herself, exclaims, as if on sudden recollection :

“He, he, I can never hit on’s name. There is such a league between my good man and he ! Is your wife at home indeed?”

Ford replies, perhaps secretly exasperated :

“Indeed she is,”

and Mrs. Page then departs with Robin, saying :

“I am sick till I see her.”

When alone, Ford again yields altogether to his naturally jealous temper, now more excited than ever, and exclaims to himself, distrusting Page's wife as well as his own :

“Has Page any brains? hath he any eyes? hath he any thinking? Sure they sleep; he hath no use of them.”

Then, completely overcome by jealousy, Ford suspects more and more, till he seems as much confused as angry, and even the boy Robin he now imagines an imp of mischief, as he exclaims :

“Why, this boy will carry a letter twenty mile, as easy as a cannon will shoot point-blank twelve score. He [Page] pieces out his wife's inclination, he gives her folly motion and advantage, and now she's going to my wife, and Falstaff's boy with her!”

He repeats :

“And Falstaff's boy with her!”

Then he bitterly continues, becoming more and more angry :

“Good plots! they are laid; and our revolted wives share damnation together.”

Then the angry husband proceeds, now believing all

his former suspicion more firmly than before, and planning his course of action in successive acts :

“ Well, I will take him, then torture my wife, pluck the borrowed veil of modesty from the so-seeming Mistress Page, divulge Page himself for a secure and wilful Actæon,¹ and to these violent proceedings all my neighbours shall cry aim.”²

A clock here strikes, and Ford in his highly excited state exclaims :

“ The clock gives me my cue and my assurance bids me search : there I shall find Falstaff ; and I shall be rather praised for this than mocked ; for it is as positive as the earth is firm that Falstaff is there : I will go.”

At this moment enter the seven—Page, Shallow, Slender, the host, Evans, Caius, and Rugby. Ford invites them to his house, Shallow saying :

“ I must excuse myself,”

while Slender, whose foolishness or simplicity seems more developed as the story proceeds, adds :

“ And so must I, sir ; we have appointed to dine with Mistress Anne, and I would not break with her for more money than I'll speak of.”

Shallow owns that he wishes for the marriage between Miss Page and his cousin Slender, and the latter exclaims, as if in anticipation :

¹ “ A famous Greek huntsman. He saw Diana bathing, for which he was changed into a stag and devoured by his own dogs.”—Lemprière's Classical Dictionary.

² “ Give encouragement.”—Staunton's notes.

“I hope I have your good-will, father Page”;

the other replies in a way that is only partly satisfactory :

“You have, Master Slender; I will stand wholly for you.”

Then to Caius he admits :

“But my wife, master doctor, is for you altogether.”

Caius eagerly adds :

“Ay, by gar, and de maid is love-a me, my nursh-a Quickly tell me so much.”

The shrewd host, however, knowing or guessing the truth as to Anne and her real feelings, now asks a general question rather embarrassing and vexatious to most of the present company :

“What say you to young Master Fenton?”

and then proceeds to favourably describe Anne Page's preferred lover :

“He capers, he dances, he has eyes of youth, he writes verses, he speaks holyday, he smells April and May.”

Then guessing aright, and speaking with blunt frankness, confidently repeats :

“He will carry it, he will carry it.”

Page, evidently a prudent though easygoing man, replies gravely :

“ Not by my consent, I promise you. The gentleman is of no bounty.”¹

The apprehensive father then reverts to historic events recorded in the latter part of Henry IV.’s reign. This reference indicates that the present play is meant to occur in Henry V.’s reign, “ the wild Prince ” of the preceding one. Page justifies his disapproval of Fenton, his daughter’s choice, and proceeds, reasonably dreading or suspecting young Fenton’s giddy or reckless habits :

“ He kept company with the wild Prince and Poins, he is of too high a region, he knows too much. No, he shall not knit a knot in his fortunes with the finger of my substance ; if he take her, let him take her simply ; the wealth I have waits on my consent, and my consent goes not that way.”

Ford, apparently too much engrossed by his own domestic troubles to be much interested in Miss Page’s love affairs, again asks Page, Evans, and Caius home to dinner, and, evidently meaning Falstaff, adds :

“ Besides your cheer, you shall have sport ; I will show you a monster—master doctor, you shall go, so shall you, Master Page—and you, Sir Hugh.”

Shallow and Slender then depart, the former saying merrily :

“ Well, fare you well—we shall have the freer wooing at Master Page’s.”

¹ “ Fortune.”—Staunton’s notes.

Caius now sends Rugby home, saying he will soon follow, while the host, always cheerful, lively, and on good terms with all, yet with a consistent regard for his own interests, exclaims :

“Farewell, my hearts : I will to my honest knight Falstaff and drink canary with him.”

Ford, raging with suppressed jealousy, hearing this, says to himself :

“I think I shall drink in pipe-wine first with him ; I’ll make him dance” ;

then asks aloud :

“Will you go, gentles ?”

And all, Page, Evans, and Caius alike, merrily agree, saying :

“Have with you to see this monster.”

The next scene is in Ford’s house, where Mrs. Page and Mrs. Ford are together, who certainly well merit the name of the “Merry Wives of Windsor” in about an equal degree. They summon two of Ford’s servants, John and Robert, with a large basket, who set it down while Mrs. Ford gives minute directions :

“As I told you before, John and Robert, be ready here hard by in the brew-house, and when I suddenly call you, come forth, and without any pause or staggering take this basket on your shoulders ; that done, trudge with it in all haste and carry it among the

whister's¹ in Datchet-mead, and there empty it in the muddy ditch, close by the Thames side."

Mrs. Page, not knowing these servants so well, asks anxiously :

"You will do it?"

while Mrs. Ford rather imperiously answers for them :

"I have told them over and over, they lack no direction : be gone and come when you are called."

John and Robert obediently depart without a word, and Robin, Falstaff's page, now presents himself, and Mrs. Ford immediately asks him :

"How now, my eyas-musket!² what news with you?"

Robin, quite at his ease, but more a practical than a merry boy, says that his master, Sir John, is come in at the back-door, and requests her company, while Mrs. Page, perhaps a little doubtful about the lad, asks :

"You little Jack-a-lent,³ have you been true to us?"

Robin then replies, with some spirit and shrewdness, but without merriment :

"Ay, I'll be sworn, my master knows not of your being here, and hath threatened to put me into everlasting liberty, if I tell you of it ; for he swears he'll turn me away."

¹ "Bleachers."—Staunton's notes.

² "Young male sparrow-hawk."—Ibid.

³ "A puppet stuck up to be thrown at in Lent."—Ibid.

Mrs. Page, reassured, with witty good-nature says :

“Thou’rt a good boy ; this secrecy of thine shall be a tailor to thee and shall make thee a new doublet and hose.—I’ll go hide me” ;

and Mrs. Ford, eager for the success of their plot, says to Mrs. Page :

“Do so,”

and to Robin :

“Go, tell thy master I am alone” ;

and, again anxious that all should go right, cautions her confederate, saying :

“Mistress Page, remember you your cue.”

Robin departs without a word, while Mrs. Page, as amused and lively as Mrs. Ford, evidently preparing herself for a spirited display of acting, merrily replies :

“I warrant thee ; if I do not act it, hiss me,”

and departs, when Mrs. Ford says in soliloquy about Falstaff, comparing herself and Mrs. Page to faithful female turtle-doves :

“We’ll use this gross watery pumpon—we’ll teach him to know turtles from jays.”

Falstaff now enters and, finding Mrs. Ford alone as he had hoped, exclaims in partly real, partly affected ecstasy :

"Have I caught thee, my heavenly jewel? ¹ Why, now let me die, for I have lived long enough; this is the period of my ambition: O this blessed hour!"

Mrs. Ford, resolved to keep up the deception for a short time, replies:

"O sweet Sir John!"

while the old dupe proceeds:

"I would thy husband were dead! I'll speak it before the best lord, I would make thee my lady."

Mrs. Ford replies, as if modestly deprecating the offered dignity:

"I, your lady, Sir John! Alas, I should be a pitiful lady."

Falstaff enthusiastically replies, in a way that might have pleased a French more than an English audience:

"Let the Court of France show me such another."

Then proceeding in the language of compliment, of which he is rather a master:

"I see how thine eye would emulate the diamond; thou hast the right-arched beauty of the brow, that becomes the ship-tire,² the tire-valiant, or any tire of Venetian admittance."

¹ This line is quoted from Sidney's "Astrophel and Stella."—Staunton's notes.

² "By the ship-tire was perhaps understood some fanciful head-dress with ornaments of glass or jewellery fashioned to resemble a ship. . . . The tire-valiant was another of the innumerable 'new-fangled tires,' as Burton calls them, which an overweening love of

Mrs. Ford, assuming a meek, modest style, very different from her real nature, replies to these compliments :

“A plain kerchief, Sir John ; my brows become nothing else, nor that well neither.”

Falstaff warmly rejoins :

“Thou art a traitor to say so, thou wouldst make an absolute courtier. . . . What made me love thee? Let that persuade thee, there’s something extraordinary in thee. . . . I love thee, none but thee, and thou deservest it.”

Mrs. Ford, acting her part well, and seeing how Falstaff is completely deceived, meekly replies :

“Do not betray me, sir. I fear you love Mistress Page.”

Falstaff, never guessing who hears him, eagerly replies, as both the merry wives would wish :

“Thou might as well say, I love to walk by the Counter-gate,¹ which is as hateful to me as the reek of a lime-kiln.”

Mrs. Ford then truly enough rejoins :

dress had imported from abroad. . . . Both were no doubt of ‘Venetian *admittance*’ or fashion, as the coiffures of that nation were all the mode at the end of the sixteenth and beginning of the seventeenth century.”—Staunton’s notes. This English admiration for Italian fashion or style recalls the words of the Duke of York describing the foreign tastes of his nephew, Richard II., though supposed to be uttered a long time previously :

“Report of fashions in proud Italy ;
Whose manners still our tardy apish nation
Limps after, in base imitation.”

—“Richard II.,” Act II., Scene 1.

¹ “The old dramatists and writers are unsparing in allusions to the counter-prison.”—Staunton’s notes.

"Well, Heaven knows how I love you, and you shall one day find it."

Falstaff earnestly replies :

"Keep in that mind ; I'll deserve it."

Mrs. Ford, deceiving him as completely as she could wish, sincerely rejoins :

"Nay, I must tell you, so do you, or else I could not be in that mind."

At this moment, Robin calls from without, probably laughing in high glee, though it is not said so :

"Mistress Ford, Mistress Ford ! here's Mistress Page at the door, sweating and blowing and looking wildly, and would needs speak with you presently."

Falstaff, evidently alarmed, though not as yet terrified, exclaims :

"She shall not see me ; I will ensconce me behind the arras."

Mrs. Ford, still acting her part well in concert with Mrs. Page, exclaims :

"Pray do so,"

adding, perhaps truly :

"She's a very tattling woman."

Falstaff hides himself, and Mrs. Page and Robin enter ; the former, pretending to be very much frightened, exclaims :

“ O Mistress Ford, what have you done? you’re shamed, you are overthrown, you are undone for ever.”

Mrs. Ford asks what’s the matter, and the other proceeds :

“ O well-a-day, Mistress Ford ! having an honest man to your husband, to give him such cause of suspicion !”

Mrs. Ford, acting the part well, innocently asks :

“ What cause of suspicion ?”

Mrs. Page, full of virtuous indignation, retorts :

“ What cause of suspicion !—Out upon you ! how am I mistook in you !”

Again Mrs. Ford asks what’s the matter, and her ally proceeds with the alarming intelligence :

“ Your husband’s coming hither, woman, with all the officers in Windsor, to search for a gentleman that he says is here now in the house, by your consent, to take an ill advantage of his absence ; you are undone.”

Mrs. Ford meekly exclaims :

“ ’Tis not so, I hope,”

and Mrs. Page devoutly continues :

“ Pray Heaven it be not so, that you have such a man here, but ’tis most certain your husband’s coming with half Windsor at his heels to search for such a one. I come before to tell you ; if you know yourself clear, why, I am glad of it, but if you have a friend here, convey him out. Be not amazed, call all your senses to you ; defend your reputation, or bid farewell to your good life for ever.”

Mrs. Ford, now pretending to be quite at her wit's end, exclaims, with a terrified confession of an important truth :

“What shall I do? There is a gentleman, my dear friend; and I fear not mine own shame, so much as his peril”;

then she adds, for the edification of the listening Falstaff :

“I had rather than a thousand pounds he were out of the house.”

Mrs. Page, well knowing both what to do and to advise, replies with a valuable suggestion and every appearance of friendship to Falstaff :

“For shame: never stand *you had rather* and *you had rather*; your husband's in the house: you cannot hide him”;

then, reverting, though only for a moment, to her virtuous horror :

“O, how have you deceived me!”

Again becoming thoroughly practical, she exclaims :

“Look, here is a basket; if he be of any reasonable stature he may creep in here, and throw foul linen upon him, as if it were going to bucking, or, it is whiting¹ time, send him by your two men to Datchet-mead.”

Mrs. Ford, in pretended despair, exclaims :

“He's too big to go in there; what shall I do?”

¹ “Bleaching.”—Staunton's notes.

Here Falstaff, who has of course heard their conversation from his hiding-place, re-enters in real terror, eagerly exclaiming to Mrs. Ford :

“Let me see’t, let me see’t, O, let me see’t ! I’ll in, I’ll in—follow your friend’s counsel : I’ll in.”

Mrs. Page exclaims, as if surprised at seeing him :

“What ! Sir John Falstaff ! ”

Then, evidently hoping to confuse him the more in his present agitation, she asks :

“Are these your letters, knight ? ”

evidently showing him his letters to herself, which tempts him to say hurriedly, though probably in a whisper :

“I love thee, and none but thee ; help me away, let me creep in here ; I’ll never——”

He stops speaking and gets into the basket, and the merry wives throw not the cleanest of linen upon Falstaff, while Mrs. Page says to Robin :

“Help to cover your master, boy ; call your men, Mistress Ford.”

Then she, probably whispering to herself, says, referring to the luckless inmate of the basket :

“You dissembling knight ! ”

Mrs. Ford summons her two servants, John and

Robert, while Robin departs without speaking, and she proceeds :

“ Go, take up these clothes here quickly : where’s the cowl-staff ? ”¹

The two servants are perhaps rather stupid or slow to understand this peremptory lady, who sharply proceeds :

“ Look, how you drumble ; carry them to the laundress in Datchet-mead ; quickly, come.”

Here enter Ford, Page, Caius, and Sir Hugh Evans ; Ford exclaims to his companions :

“ Pray you come near ; if I suspect without cause, why then make sport of me, then let me be your jest ; I deserve it.”

Then, addressing the two servants with the basket :

“ How now ? whither bear you this ? ”

The men, either charged by their mistress not to tell the truth or ignorant of it, truly reply :

“ To the laundress forsooth,”

but say no more, when Mrs. Ford comes promptly to their relief, and, to prevent the risk of their saying more, says sharply to her husband :

“ Why, what have you to do whither they bear it ? ”

¹ “ A staff or pole for carrying a basket at each end.”—Staunton’s notes.

adding scornfully :

“ You were best meddle with buck-washing.”

Ford, though full of angry suspicion, never guesses the truth, and his servants depart with their precious burden. Ford, telling his friends he has had a dream, exclaims in eager excitement, yet full of hope :

“ I’ll tell you my dream.”

Yet this he does not do, but gives them eager directions, saying :

“ Here, here, here be my keys: ascend my chambers, search, seek, find out, I’ll warrant we’ll unkennel the fox—let me stop this way first—so now uncap.”¹

Page, always calm or easygoing, replies soothingly to his irritable friend :

“ Good Master Ford, be contented: you wrong yourself too much.”

Ford, however, goes off to search his house thoroughly, while his three companions, Evans, Caius, and Page, alike wonder at his vehemence. Evans exclaims in his Welsh accent :

“ This is fery fantastical humours and jealousies,”

while Caius, though perhaps with doubtful truth, says :

“ By gar, ’tis no de fashion of France, it is not jealous in France.”

¹ “Unearth.”—Staunton’s notes.

Page, though quite unsuspecting, practically suggests :

“ Nay, follow him, gentlemen, see the issue of his search.”

The three then follow Ford, leaving the two “merry wives” highly amused at what is passing. Mrs. Page, delighted, asks her friend and ally :

“ Is there not a double excellency in this? ”

and Mrs. Ford, equally so, replies :

“ I know not which pleases me better, that my husband is deceived, or Sir John.”

Mrs. Page, overjoyed and probably laughing while alluding to Falstaff, exclaims :

“ What a taking was he in when your husband asked what was in the basket! ”

Mrs. Ford, equally charmed at the success of their trick, rejoins, also alluding to Falstaff among the dirty linen :

“ I am half-afraid he will have need of washing ; so throwing him into the water will do him a benefit.”

Mrs. Page, who now, perhaps, is the more angry with Falstaff, since she heard him confidentially disparage her to Mrs. Ford, implacably exclaims :

“ Hang him, dishonest rascal! I would all of the same strain¹ were in the same distress.”

¹ “Tendency.”—Staunton’s notes.

Mrs. Ford now makes a correct guess :

“I think my husband hath some special suspicion of Falstaff’s being here ; for I never saw him so gross in his jealousy till now.”

Mrs. Page, ready with a new device, rejoins :

“I will lay a plot to try that : and we will yet have more tricks with Falstaff.”

Mrs. Ford, who, despite her shrewdness, strangely underrates the cunning “she-Mercury,” asks :

“Shall we send that foolish carrion, Mistress Quickly, to him, and excuse his throwing into the water and give him another hope, to betray him to another punishment ?”

Though Mrs. Ford here shows contempt for Mrs. Quickly, the latter seems, from her successful cunning in all this play, to certainly never deserve the name of “foolish.” She seems, indeed, throughout its whole course to deceive, more or less, almost everybody in it with whom she deals. Mrs. Page, however, cordially agrees with Mrs. Ford in sending her again to deceive old Falstaff, saying :

“We will do it ; let him be sent for to-morrow, eight o’clock, to have amends.”

At this moment the four gentlemen re-enter the room, after a thoroughly unsuccessful search after Falstaff. Ford, now puzzled and, somewhat like Othello, “perplexed in the extreme,” exclaims :

“I cannot find him : maybe, the knave bragged of that he could not compass.”

Mrs. Page says, perhaps aside, to Mrs. Ford :

“ Heard you that ? ”

and the latter replies :

“ Ay, ay, peace.”

Then she reproaches her spouse, asking sarcastically :

“ You use me well, Master Ford, do you ? ”

Ford, still suspicious, briefly replies :

“ Ay, I do so,”

and she proceeds :

“ Heaven make you better than your thoughts.”

To this wish the jealous, yet puzzled Ford replies with suppressed bitterness :

“ Amen,”

and Mrs. Page, taking her friend’s part, observes in reproof :

“ You do yourself, mighty wrong, Master Ford,”

while he, still uneasy about both the ladies, bluntly replies :

“ Ay, ay ; I must bear it.”

Evans and Caius now speak, as if alike ashamed of

searching the house in vain, Evans saying emphatically :

“If there be any pody in the house, and in the chambers and in the coffers and in the presses, Heaven forgive my sins at the day of judgment.”

Caius, always more excitable, adds :

“By gar, nor I too : dere is no bodies.”

Page, more familiar with Ford, now reproves him :

“Fie, fie, Master Ford, are you not ashamed? . . . I would not have your distemper in this kind for the wealth of Windsor Castle.”

Ford replies, apparently as much depressed as angry :

“’Tis my fault,¹ Master Page ; I suffer for it.”

Evans continues, reprimanding him :

“You suffer for a pad conscience: your wife is as honest a ’omans as I will desire among five thousand, and five hundred, too.”

Caius, who now agrees with Evans, here adds :

“By gar, I see ’tis an honest woman.”

Ford, apparently still unconvinced and agitated, yet forced for the present to apologise for his suspicion, briefly replies :

“Well, I promised you a dinner. Come, come, walk in the park ; I pray you, pardon me, I will hereafter make known to you why I

¹ “Misfortune.”—Staunton’s notes.

have done this. Come, wife; come, Mistress Page. I pray you pardon me."

Page, always good-humoured, exclaims :

"Let's go in, gentlemen; but trust me, we'll mock him. I do invite you to-morrow morning to my house to breakfast; after we'll go a birding together";

and adds as an attraction much liked at this period :

"I have a fine hawk for the bush, shall it be so?"

Ford, as if confused or weary owing to his mental agitation, merely replies :

"Anything,"

while Evans and Caius, now quite reconciled, alike accept the tempting invitation with pleasure. Evans, recalling the scornful jesting of the host, exclaims as they depart, in rather a vindictive spirit for a clergyman, though he may be partly in joke :

"I pray you now remembrance to-morrow on the lousy knave, mine host."

Caius, equally offended with the latter, agrees, saying :

"Dat is good; by gar, vit all my heart,"

and Evans, as if trying to rouse anger against the absent host, exclaims :

"A lousy knave; to have his gibes and his mockeries."

This lively party depart, and the following scene is the first really sentimental one in this truly comic play.

Fenton and Anne Page are together in a room at Page's house. They are really in love with each other, yet Page opposes Fenton's suit to his daughter, preferring Slender, while her mother opposes him in behalf of Dr. Caius. Yet neither Mr. nor Mrs. Page is of a harsh nature, so Fenton and Miss Page now take counsel together. Fenton begins rather regretfully :

“I see I cannot get thy father's love.
Therefore no more turn me to him, sweet Nan. . . .
He doth object I am too great of birth,
And that my state being gall'd with my expense,
I seek to heal it only by his wealth.”

Fenton then admits some of his own errors or delinquencies as causes of Page's opposition to him :

“Besides these, other bars he lays before me,
My riots past, my wild societies.
And tells me 'tis a thing impossible
I should love thee, but as a property.”

It is evident from this confession that the prudent Mr. Page, with some reason, distrusts his would-be son-in-law. The admitted fact of young Fenton's former association with “the wild Prince and Poins,” though his name is not mentioned in the play of “Henry IV.” describing these two profligates, is likely believed by Anne, who, rather sympathising with her father, replies :

“May be, he tells you true.”

Fenton, apparently as resolved as the wild Prince

himself was to amend his courses and lead a new life, on his accession to the throne as Henry V., replies, it is to be hoped sincerely :

“No, Heaven so speed me in my time to come.”

Yet now he makes a rather startling admission, which certainly goes far to justify Mr. Page’s disapproval :

“Albeit, I will confess, thy father’s wealth
Was the first motive that I wooed thee, Anne :
Yet, wooing thee, I found thee of more value
Than stamps in gold or sums in sealed bags ;
And ‘tis the very riches of thyself
That now I aim at.”

Anne, quite won over by his protestations, yet sincerely loving her father, replies :

“Gentle Master Fenton,
Yet seek my father’s love ; still seek it, sir :
If opportunity and humblest suit
Cannot attain it, why then—hark you hither.”

They converse apart without leaving the room, into which enter Shallow, Slender, and Mrs. Quickly. Old Shallow, sincerely anxious for his cousin Slender’s marriage with Anne, is evidently annoyed at now finding Fenton talking to her, and exclaims to Mrs. Quickly, whom everybody seems to trust :

“Break their talk, Mistress Quickly ; my kinsman shall speak for himself.”

Slender, hopelessly silly or shy, perhaps both, exclaims, trying to muster up courage to address Anne :

“I'll make a shaft or a bolt on 't.¹ 'Tis but venturing.”

Shallow, trying to encourage him, says :

“Be not dismayed,”

and Slender nervously answers :

“No, she shall not dismay me: I care not for that—but that I am afraid.”

Mrs. Quickly, likely obeying Shallow, says to Anne :

“Hark ye, Master Slender would speak a word with you.”

Anne, doubtless comparing secretly her handsome, attractive suitor Fenton with the foolish, timid one before her, replies aloud :

“I come to him,”

and then to herself, as she looks at Slender :

“This is my father's choice,”

and then makes a natural and sensible reflection, suggested by her own present position :

“O what a world of vile, ill-favoured faults
Looks handsome in three hundred pounds a year!”

Mrs. Quickly, resolved for her own interests to be

¹ “Equivalent to our saying, ‘Hit or miss.’”—Staunton's notes.

on good terms with all parties, and knowing well how to be so, now civilly addresses young Fenton, asking :

“And how does good Master Fenton? Pray you, a word with you.”

Shallow and his cousin Slender, their names indicating their shallow wits and slender understandings, now alike beset Anne Page, who well knows both and what to say to each of them. Shallow says aside, to encourage Slender :

“She’s coming ; to her, coz.”

Then, trying to rouse or induce his awkward cousin to imitate or follow his father’s example, he exclaims, provoked at his awkwardness :

“O boy, thou hadst a father.”

Slender, hearing him and foolishly fancying he should repeat his words, and wishing to make himself agreeable to Anne, while interpreting them in his own silly fashion, says :

“I had a father, Mistress Anne ; my uncle can tell you good jests of him.—Pray, uncle, tell Mistress Anne the jest, how my father stole two geese out of a pen, good uncle.”

Shallow, still acting as introducer or interpreter for his blundering young relative, briefly comes to the point by saying :

“Mistress Anne, my cousin loves you.”

Slender, trying to take his cue from Shallow, while apparently having few if any ideas of his own, with eager awkwardness protests :

“Ay, that I do ; as well as I love any woman in Glostershire.”

Shallow then tries what a little temptation may do with Anne, saying promisingly :

“He will maintain you like a gentlewoman.”

Slender eagerly confirms and tries to add to this promise, declaring :

“Ay, that I will, come cut and long tail¹ under the degree of a squire.”

Shallow, continuing in the same strain, and thinking he can explain the best, says :

“He will make you a hundred and fifty pounds jointure.”

Anne shrewdly replies, well understanding both of them :

“Good Master Shallow, let him woo for himself.”

Shallow, hoping from these words that she is about to favour Slender, and likely glad to have no more trouble himself in the matter, replies :

“Marry, I thank you for it ; I thank you for that good comfort. She calls you, coz ; I'll leave you.”

He perhaps withdraws a little distance, and Anne

¹ “Let any come that may, good and bad.”—Staunton's notes.

herself says, as if to encourage Slender to speak at all events :

“Now, Master Slender.”

He simply or timidly repeats :

“Now, good Mistress Anne.”

and she reasonably asks :

“What is your will ?”

Slender, mistaking or pretending to mistake her meaning, replies :

“My will ? od’s heartlings, that’s a pretty jest indeed ! I never made my will yet, I thank Heaven ; I am not such a sickly creature, I give Heaven praise.”

Anne then plainly asks :

“I mean, Master Slender, what would you with me ?”

Slender answers with truthful simplicity :

“Truly, for my own part, I would little or nothing with you ; your father and my uncle hath made motions, if it be my luck, so ; if not, happy man be his dole !”¹

Then, wishing to leave all explanation as well as responsibility to his elders, he modestly adds :

“They can tell you how things go better than I can ; you may ask your father ; here he comes.”

¹ “Let the share or lot dealt to him be happiness.”—Staunton’s notes.

Mr. and Mrs. Page enter, the former favouring Slender, and rather gravely reproving Fenton for his addresses to Anne, while Mrs. Page, though preferring Dr. Caius for a son-in-law, is yet more indulgent towards Fenton than her husband is. Page now addresses the two young men before him in a very different manner :

“Now, Master Slender: love him, daughter Anne.”

Then, addressing Fenton, he angrily asks :

“Why, how now! What does Mr. Fenton here? You wrong me, sir, thus still to haunt my house; I told you, sir, my daughter is disposed of.”

Fenton mildly exclaims :

“Nay, Master Page, be not impatient,”

while Mrs. Page, more civil to Fenton, yet opposing his suit, says :

“Good Master Fenton, come not to my child,”

and Page adds rather sternly :

“She is no match for you.”

Fenton asks to be heard and Page firmly refuses :

“No, good Master Fenton! Come, Master Shallow”;

then, rather anticipating matters, he adds :

“Come, son Slender, in.”

Then, instead of inviting Fenton, Page adds rather harshly :

“Knowing my mind, you wrong me, Master Fenton,”

and Page, Shallow, and Slender go out, leaving Anne with her mother, Fenton, and Mrs. Quickly ; the last named, ever on the watch, now urges Fenton, perhaps aside, to appeal to Mrs. Page, and he, following her advice, says :

“Good Mistress Page, for that I love your daughter,
In such a righteous fashion as I do,
Perforce against all checks, rebukes, and manners
. . . let me have your good will”;

while Anne herself sadly and scornfully objects to Slender, exclaiming, in simple truth and earnestness :

“Good mother, do not marry me to yond’ fool.”

Mrs. Page, preferring Dr. Caius in her mind, replies rather evasively :

“I mean it not, I seek you a better husband.”

Probably all present know whom she means, but Mrs. Quickly promptly declares :

“That’s my master, master doctor.”

Anne, apparently disliking Caius even more than she does Slender, passionately exclaims in quaint language :

“Alas ! I had rather be set quick i’ the earth,
And bowl’d to death with turnips.”

Mrs. Page then says good-naturedly :

“Come, trouble not yourself, good Master Fenton,
I will not be your friend nor enemy.
My daughter will I question how she loves you,
And as I find her, so am I affected.
Till then farewell, sir—she must needs go in,
Her father will be angry.”

Mrs. Page likely admires the handsome Mr. Fenton secretly, but does not wish to dispute with her husband on the subject. She departs with Anne ; and Mrs. Quickly, left alone with Fenton, pursues her own private interests in her usual practical, intelligent manner. She addresses Fenton rather proudly, and favours him with a record of her proceedings, perhaps partly invented :

“This is my doing now—‘Nay,’ said I, “*will you cast away your child on a fool and a physician?* Look, Master Fenton,—this is my doing.”

Fenton, equally credulous, grateful, and sentimental, replies :

“I thank thee and I pray thee once¹ to-night,
Give my sweet Nan this ring.”

Then, in practical gratitude to Mrs. Quickly for her alleged efforts in his behalf, the young lover adds :

“There’s for your pains,”

and departs. Mrs. Quickly when alone, like Richard III., reveals her character in soliloquy ; being alike gratified by Fenton’s present and being trusted by

¹ “Some time to-night.”—Staunton’s notes.

so many different persons at this time, she exclaims, praising Fenton :

“Now, Heaven send thee good fortune ! A kind heart he hath ; a woman would run through fire and water for such a kind heart. But yet I would my Master had Mistress Anne, or I would Master Slender had her ; or, in sooth, I would Master Fenton had her ; I will do what I can for them all three ; for so I have promised, and I'll be as good as my word ; but speciously for Master Fenton.”

Then, remembering her older acquaintance, as well as the young and middle-aged ones, all of whom she seems to understand with rare shrewdness, she adds :

“Well, I must be of another errand to Sir John Falstaff from my two mistresses.”

Then, evidently enjoying her different employments, concludes :

“What a beast am I to slack it !”

and departs full of cunning and intrigue.

The next scene is in the Garter Inn, into which enter Falstaff and Bardolph. The latter, though apparently resembling Pistol and Nym in his habits, is not much with them in this play, and though attending Falstaff, seems to know little, if anything, of his old patron's present intrigue with the “merry wives.” Falstaff, as he has often doubtless done before, tells Bardolph to bring him a quart of sack, his favourite beverage, and after his follower goes to bring it, he reveals to himself his late adventures in a naturally despondent spirit, yet still ignorant

of the real nature of the late plots against him. He asks himself in moody dejection :

“Have I lived to be carried in a basket like a barrow of butcher’s offal and to be thrown in the Thames?”

Then, confident that he will not be again similarly deceived, yet fated soon to be so, he continues :

“Well, if I be served such another trick I’ll have my brains taken out and buttered, and give them to a dog for a new year’s gift.”

Then, minutely recalling what he has endured, he proceeds :

“The rogues slighted me into the river with as little remorse as they would have drowned a blind bitch’s puppies, fifteen i’ the litter, and you may know by my size that I have a kind of alacrity in sinking. . . . I had been drowned but that the shore was shelvy and shallow ; a death that I abhor, for the water swells a man and what a thing should I have been, had I been swelled ! I should have been a mountain of mummy.”

It seems strange that Falstaff, knowing and owning his unwieldy corpulence, should still be vain of his personal appearance. On this subject, and on it alone, the shrewd old knave, well acquainted with various companions, from those in the English Court to the frequenters of low taverns in London, is deceived by a personal vanity exposing him to the successful arts of people altogether below him in natural intelligence, or even knowledge of the world. Bardolph returns immediately after Falstaff’s soliloquy with the wine, and introducing the artful Mrs. Quickly. At this important crisis of his life it is remarkable that Falstaff seems hardly to consult or trust his three

former adherents, Bardolph, Nym, and Pistol, nor has he replaced them by new attendants. He is therefore now left alone to deal with the trio, Mrs. Ford, Mrs. Page, and Mrs. Quickly, who, in strict alliance for a common purpose, completely deceive him throughout. Falstaff sends off Bardolph to bring him more sack, and again receives Mrs. Quickly alone. This woman, cunning as ever, is now intrusted by the merry wives with a new plot to deceive Falstaff, and ably executes her commission, which is evidently quite after her own heart. Accordingly she begins with assumed civility :

“Sir, I come to your worship from Mistress Ford.”

At hearing this name, the outwitted old Falstaff answers with a dismal attempt at a pun :

“Mistress Ford ! I have had ford enough : I was thrown into the ford ; I have my belly full of ford.”

Mrs. Quickly, well instructed by Mrs. Ford, replies with pretended sympathy :

“Alas ! the day ! good heart, that was not her fault ” ;

and, doubtless told by Mrs. Ford to lay all the blame on the servants, John and Robert, Mrs. Quickly proceeds :

“She does so take on with her men ; they mistook their erection.”

Falstaff, in helpless yet comic sarcasm, retorts :

“So did I mine, to build upon a foolish woman’s promise.”

Mrs. Quickly now redoubles her deceitful excuses, and with complete success, saying :

“Well, she laments, sir, for it, that it would yearn your heart to see it.”

Then she becomes communicative with new temptations :

“Her husband goes this morning a-birding ; she desires you once more to come to her between eight and nine. I must carry her word quickly ; she’ll make you amends, I warrant you.”

Falstaff, again won over by this artful go-between, replies, just as she would wish to hear :

“Well, I will visit her ; tell her so, and bid her think what a man is ; let her consider his frailty and then judge of my merit.”

Mrs. Quickly, probably much amused, replies :

“I will tell her,”

and Falstaff, then mistaking or pretending to mistake the time appointed, asks :

“Between nine and ten sayst thou ?”

But Mrs. Quickly repeats :

“Eight and nine, sir,”

and Falstaff rejoins :

“Well, be gone ; I will not miss her.”

Mrs. Quickly, perhaps laughing to herself and rejoiced

at the success of her mission, gently replies, carefully concealing her secret thoughts :

“Peace be with you, sir,”

and departs. Falstaff, evidently revived in spirits at what he believes is cheering news, exclaims when alone :

“I marvel I hear not of Master Brook ; he sent me word to stay within ; I like his money well. O here he comes,”

and accordingly Ford enters alone. Falstaff, never having the least idea who he really is, immediately asks :

“Now, Master Brook, you come to know what hath passed between me and Ford’s wife.”

The other replies with intense, bitter emphasis :

“Such indeed, Sir John, is my business.”

Falstaff then says he was in Ford’s house at the hour appointed, and the latter asks :

“And sped you, sir ?”

He is doubtless astonished to hear Falstaff gravely answer :

“Very ill-favouredly, Master Brook.”

Ford, deeply interested, yet perhaps for a moment somewhat relieved, asks :

“How so, sir ? Did she change her determination ?”

“

Falstaff, eager to tell the whole truth to the equally eager listener, earnestly replies :

“No, Master Brook, but the peaking cornuto her husband, dwelling in a continual 'larum of jealousy, comes me in the midst of our encounter, after we had embraced, kissed, protested and as it were spoke the prologue to our comedy, and at his heels a rabble of his companions, thither provoked and instigated by his distemper, and, forsooth, to search his house for his wife's love.”

Ford, remembering how carefully he had searched the whole house, asks in wonder :

“What, while you were there?”

Falstaff with grave emphasis replies :

“While I was there,”

and Ford again inquires in increasing amazement :

“And did he search for you and could not find you?”

Falstaff, as anxious to tell as Ford is to hear the truth, deliberately replies :

“You shall hear. As good luck would have it, comes in Mistress Page, gives intelligence of Ford's approach, and by her invention and by Ford's wife's distraction, they conveyed me into a buck-basket.”

Ford can only exclaim and repeat, in utter astonishment :

“A buck-basket!”

Falstaff emphatically repeats, describing bitterly all he has suffered, believing he has the sympathy of his secretly enraged and almost frantic listener :

"Yes! a buck-basket, rammed me in with foul shirts and smocks, socks, foul stockings, greasy napkins, that, Master Brook, there was the rankest compound of villainous smell that ever offended nostril."

Falstaff then details how he was carried by two of Ford's servant men to Datchet-mead, adding :

"You shall hear, Master Brook, what I have suffered to bring this woman to evil for your good. They took me on their shoulders ; met the jealous knave their master at the door, who asked them once or twice what they had in their basket ; I quaked for fear lest the lunatic knave would have searched it. . . . Well, on went he for a search, and away went I for foul clothes. But mark the sequel, Master Brook ; I suffered the pangs of three several deaths : first, an intolerable fright . . . next to be compassed like a good bilbo, in the circumference of a peck, hilt to point, heel to head, and then to be stopped in like a strong distillation with stinking clothes . . . think of that—a man of my kidney—think of that ; that am as subject to heat as butter. . . . And in the height of this bath, when I was more than half-stewed in grease like a Dutch dish, to be thrown into the Thames and cooled, glowing hot, in that surge, like a horseshoe ; think of that, Master Brook."

Ford pretends to sympathise at this narrative, yet asks :

"My suit then is desperate, you'll undertake her no more ?"

But Falstaff, who, as he had previously and privately owned, liked Ford's money well, warmly replies, as if full of steady friendship and perseverance :

"Master Brook, I will be thrown into *Ætna*, as I have been into Thames, ere I will leave her thus."

And he then astonishes Ford yet more, if possible, by new information :

“Her husband is this morning gone a-birding; I have received from her another embassy of meeting; 'twixt eight and nine is the hour, Master Brook.”

Ford says it is already past eight, and Falstaff promptly rejoins, apparently recovered from his fright or recent sufferings and eager for more of Ford's money:

“Is it? I will then address¹ me to my appointment. Come to me at your convenient leisure and you shall know how I speed. . . . Adieu, you shall have her, Master Brook, you shall,”

and Falstaff departs, leaving Ford alone, who, as before, indulges in a soliloquy, but this time is even more astounded, if possible. At first he can hardly believe he is in his waking senses, and exclaims, really bewildered by all he has just heard:

“Hum! ha! is this a vision? is this a dream? do I sleep? Master Ford, awake; awake, Master Ford. . . . This 'tis to be married, this 'tis to have linen and buck-baskets! . . . He is at my house: he cannot 'scape me; 'tis impossible he should; he cannot creep into a halfpenny purse, nor into a pepper-box, but lest the devil that guides him should aid him, I will search impossible places.”

He departs nearly distracted, but now more than ever resolved on revenge or discovery, yet with none to aid him, or at least to quite share his confidence.

In the next scene (Act IV.) Mrs. Page is in a street with her young son William and Mrs. Quickly. The latter, who has seen Falstaff since Mrs. Page has, says that he is likely now to be at Ford's house, adding, doubtless much amused:

¹ “Prepare.”—Staunton's notes.

"Truly, he is very courageous mad about his throwing into the water. Mrs. Ford desires you to come suddenly."

Mrs. Page says she will be with her by and by,¹ then says playfully about her boy :

"I'll but bring my young man here to school. Look where his master comes ; 'tis a playing-day, I see,"

and Sir Hugh Evans appears, saying that Master Slender has—

"Let the boys leave to play."

Hearing this, Mrs. Quickly, among whose probably many faults ill-nature seems to have no place, exclaims :

"Blessing of his heart !"

but Mrs. Page now owns that her husband is not satisfied with her son's progress, and requires Evans to ask him some questions "in his accidence."² Evans accordingly asks in his usual Welsh accent, which Shakespeare evidently well knows ; yet while Evans's and Mrs. Quickly's remarks and questions are rather amusing, the boy does not appear an intelligent sample of his age, and seems introduced only to show off these two originals. Willie Page, probably like a lad of the period, less indulged than those of his

¹ "In Shakespeare's time 'immediateiy,' not as now, some time hence."—Staunton's notes.

² "The particular work here referred to is the old English introduction to Latin Grammar, called Lily's Accidence."—Staunton's notes.

age were at a later time, is told by his mother and Evans to hold up his head and answer questions. Evans asks :

“William, how many numbers is in nouns?”

Willie answers :

“Two,”

when Mrs. Quickly interposes :

“Truly, I thought there had been one number more, because they say, od’s nouns.”

Evans, amazed, yet unable to silence this woman, exclaims pompously :

“Peace your tattlings. What is fair, William?”

The lad, knowing the Latin name, answers :

“Pulcher,”

upon which the irrepressible Mrs. Quickly, no Latin scholar, exclaims :

“*Poul-cats!* there are fairer things than poul-cats, sure.”

Evans again tries to silence her :

“You are a very simplicity ‘oman, I pray you, peace,”

and again examining the boy in Latin, pronounces “Hic, hæc, hoc,” as “Hing, hang, hog.”

Mrs. Quickly, catching at the last words, provokingly exclaims :

“ Hang hog is Latin for bacon, I warrant you,”

and Evans, out of patience, replies :

“ Leave your prabbles, ‘oman,”

and unluckily asks Willie :

“ What is your genitive case plural ? ”

The lad truly replies :

“ Horum, harum, horum,”

when Mrs. Quickly explodes, thinking those words apply either to herself or some of her acquaintance, and she exclaims, as if morally shocked :

“ Fie on her—never name her, child.”

Evans, indignant at her rendering, says sternly :

“ For shame, ‘oman,”

but Mrs. Quickly, firmly believing her translation, actually ventures to reprove him, saying :

“ You do ill to teach the child such words ”;

then, as if addressing the mother :

“ He teaches him to hick and to hock, which they’ll do fast enough of themselves ; and to call *horam* : fie upon you ! ”

Evans, angry, but apparently hardly knowing how to explain or how to stop her, asks :

“Oman, art thou lunatics? hast thou no understandings for thy cases and the numbers of the genders? Thou art as foolish Christian creatures as I would desires.”

Mrs. Quickly is perhaps about to retort when Mrs. Page exclaims :

“Prythee, hold thy peace,”

and soon after, as if gratified rather than otherwise with Willie’s progress, observes :

“He is a better scholar than I thought he was,”

and Evans rejoins :

“He is a good sprag¹ memory. Farewell, Mrs. Page,”

and they part company. Throughout this little scene, which has little reference to the rest of the play, young Page shows no wit, boyish fun, nor merriment. When before an apparently indulgent master, a fond mother, and a good-natured, lively old gossip like Mrs. Quickly, the lad might have made many jokes, and been very amusing, but he shows no cheerfulness or spirit whatever. It is perhaps true that English lads of Shakespeare’s period, and likely before and for some time after it, were far more strictly brought up and in much greater awe of their parents and teachers than would be easy to believe now. The

¹ “Ready.”—Staunton’s notes.

only two lads introduced in this lively comedy, Robin and Willie, certainly add little or nothing to its merriment, though both are so involved with comic characters.

The next scene is in Ford's house, where Mrs. Ford and Falstaff enter. The latter, as deceived as before by Mrs. Ford's pretended regret at his ill-usage, begins :

“Mistress Ford, your sorrow hath eaten up my sufferance. . . . But are you sure of your husband now?”

Mrs. Ford kindly replies :

“He's a-birding, sweet Sir John,”

when Mrs. Page, doubtless according to previous arrangement, knocks at the door, and Mrs. Ford, persuading Falstaff to go into another room, receives Mrs. Page alone, and after greeting, says aside :

“Speak louder,”

wishing Falstaff to hear what is coming. Mrs. Page accordingly begins :

“Truly, I am so glad you have nobody here.”

Mrs. Ford asks :

“Why?”

and then Mrs. Page declares that Ford is again as jealous as ever, saying :

“ He so takes on yonder with my husband ; so rails against all married mankind ; so curses all Eve’s daughters, of what complexion soever ; and so buffets himself in the forehead, crying, ‘ *Peer out, peer out!* ’ that any madness I ever yet beheld seemed but tameness, civility, and patience, to this his distemper he is in now. I am glad the fat knight is not here.”

Mrs. Ford, also wishing to frighten Falstaff, asks with assumed anxiety :

“ Why, does he talk of him ? ”

and Mrs. Page eagerly replies :

“ Of none but him, and swears he was carried out the last time he searched for him in a basket ; protests to my husband he is now here, and hath drawn him and the rest of their company from their sport to make another experiment of his suspicion, but I am glad the knight is not here ; now he shall see his own foolery.”

Mrs. Ford, in pretended terror, asks eagerly :

“ How near is he, Mistress Page ? ”

and on her replying that Ford will soon arrive, Mrs. Ford exclaims, as if terrified and helpless :

“ I am undone ! —the knight is here.”

Mrs. Page, as if quite out of patience with Mrs. Ford and much alarmed for her, replies :

“ Why then you are utterly shamed, and he’s but a dead man. What a woman are you ! Away with him, away with him ; better shame than murder.”

Mrs. Ford eagerly asks :

“ Which way should he go ? how should I bestow him ? shall I put him into the basket again ? ”

Falstaff, terrified at hearing the idea of a repetition, bursts from his concealment, exclaiming :

“ No, I’ll come no more i’ the basket. May I not go out ere he comes ? ”

Mrs. Page, as if truly grieved, replies :

“ Alas, three of Master Ford’s brothers watch the door with pistols, that none shall issue out, otherwise you might slip away ere he comes.”

Then, as if becoming stern, she asks the terrified dupe :

“ But what make you here ? ”

Falstaff, now too frightened to attempt any excuse or explanation, asks in confused alarm :

“ What shall I do ? I’ll creep up into the chimney.”

But this retreat is also impossible, Mrs. Ford exclaiming :

“ There they use always to discharge their birding pieces,”

and soon she declares that there is no hiding-place in the house which Ford will not search, so finally Mrs. Page advises him, as his only chance of escape, to go out of the house disguised. Mrs. Ford then asks in assumed anxiety :

“ How might we disguise him ? ”

and herself replies, as if in real alarm for the old knight’s safety :

“Alas the day! I know not. There is no woman’s gown big enough for him, otherwise he might put on a hat, a muffler,¹ and a kerchief and so escape.”

Falstaff, now quite at his wits’ end, which he very rarely is, exclaims almost in desperation to both ladies :

“Good hearts, devise something, any extremity, rather than a mischief.”

A bright thought occurs to Mrs. Ford, who exclaims :

“My maid’s aunt, the fat woman of Brentford, has a gown above.”

Mrs. Page, catching at the idea, replies :

“On my word it will serve him ; she’s as big as he is, and there’s her thrummed hat and her muffler too. Run up, Sir John.”

Mrs. Ford kindly exclaims :

“Go, go, sweet Sir John ; Mistress Page and I will look some linen for your head,”

and Mrs. Page eagerly adds :

“Quick, quick, we’ll come dress you straight ; put on the gown the while.”

Falstaff, eager to try the disguise, hurries away to seek it, while the two wives converse with each other ; Mrs. Ford owns that her husband cannot

¹ “A contrivance adopted by women to conceal a portion of their face, consisted usually of a linen bandage which covered the mouth and chin.”—Staunton’s notes.

endure this old woman of Brentford, and has forbidden her his house, while Mrs. Page, if anything more angry with Falstaff than Mrs. Ford is, exclaims angrily :

“Heaven guide him to thy husband’s cudgel, and the devil guide his cudgel afterwards.”

Mrs. Ford asks if her husband is really coming, and hears from Mrs. Page that he is, and she adds that Ford has had some intelligence about the basket. Mrs. Ford then says she will make her servants again carry the same basket to meet Ford at the door as before ; while Mrs. Page, full of wrath at the unlucky old knight, exclaims almost spitefully :

“Hang him, dishonest varlet ; we cannot misuse him enough,”

and while Mrs. Ford goes to get the linen for Falstaff’s head, she repeats some lines to herself, perhaps of her own composition, and which refer to the present situation :

“We’ll leave a proof by that which we will do,
Wives may be merry, and yet honest too :
We do not act, that often jest and laugh,
’Tis old, but true,—‘*Still swine eat all the draf*’.”

She goes out, and Mrs. Ford enters with her two servant-men bringing the same basket as before, now containing only clothes, saying they will meet their master near the door, and are to set it down if he tells them. She leaves the room and the two men have a short talk together. But they show little

of the wit or humour with which Walter Scott and Dickens would likely have inspired them, considering their very amusing, comic situation. The first says, meaning the basket :

“Come, come, take it up.”

The second answers :

“Pray Heaven, it be not full of knight again,”

and the other merely replies :

“I hope not ; I had as lief bear so much lead.”

Ford, Page, Shallow, Caius, and Evans now enter. Ford seems again in a jealous frenzy, which none of his three companions can understand. He exclaims to Page, who evidently has been vainly reasoning with him :

“Ay, but if it prove true, Master Page, have you any way then to unfool me again ?”

Then addressing the servants :

“Set down the basket, villain,—somebody call my wife. Youth in a basket ! O, you pandery rascals ! there’s a knot, a ging,^x a pack, a conspiracy against me ; now shall the devil be shamed. What ! wife, I say, come, come forth ; behold what honest clothes you send forth to bleaching !”

His angry excitement astonishes his friends, who remonstrate, thinking him almost out of his senses. Page exclaims in friendly, perhaps warning, reproach :

“Gang.”—Staunton’s notes.

"Why, this passes,¹ master Ford ! you are not to go loose any longer. You must be pinioned."

Evans says, much to the same effect :

"Why, this is lunatics ! this is mad as a mad dog !"

while even old Shallow, roused by the words of his companions, adds in remonstrance :

"Indeed, Master Ford, this is not well, indeed."

Mrs. Ford now re-enters, and her husband proceeds, more suspicious than ever, yet trying to be sarcastic :

"So say I too, sir. Come hither, Mistress Ford ; Mistress Ford, the honest woman, the modest wife, the virtuous creature that hath the jealous fool to her husband ! I suspect without cause, mistress, do I ?"

Mrs. Ford, knowing she is quite safe, earnestly replies :

"Heaven be my witness, you do, if you suspect me in any dishonesty."

Ford, apparently mistaking her earnestness for mere effrontery, replies scornfully :

"Well said, brazen-face, hold it out."

Then, thinking he addresses some one hid in the basket, calls out, while pulling out the clothes :

"Come forth, sirrah."

¹ "Surpasses."—Staunton's notes.

But as no one comes forth, Page, again wondering at Ford’s strange excitement, exclaims :

“This surpasses !”

while Mrs. Ford reprovingly asks her husband :

“Are you not ashamed? Let the basket alone.”

Ford, still suspicious, retorts :

“I shall find you anon,”

when Evans, as surprised as Page at Ford’s excited behaviour, exclaims :

“ ‘Tis unreasonable! . . . Come away.”

Ford persists in emptying out the basket, and in self-vindication exclaims :

“Master Page, as I am a man, there was one conveyed out of my house yesterday in this basket; why may he not be here again? In my house I am sure he is; my intelligence is true, my jealousy is reasonable; pluck me out all the linen.”

Mrs. Ford and Page alike declare that Ford is mistaken, while Shallow, despite his expressive name, feels that he is wiser at present than Ford himself, and ventures on reproof :

“By my fidelity, this is not well, Master Ford: this wrongs you,”

while Evans also administers to the suspicious husband a short lecture :

“Master Ford, you must pray and not follow the imagination of your own heart: this is jealousies.”

Ford is now forced to admit :

“ Well, he’s not here I seek for,”

and Page, always reasonable though unheeded, observes :

“ No, nor nowhere else but in your brain.”

Ford, puzzled and rather confounded, yet not satisfied, appeals to them all again :

“ Help to search my house this one time ; if I find not what I seek, show no colour for my extremity, let me for ever be your table-spoil ; let them say of me, ‘ *As jealous as Ford, that searched a hollow walnut for his wife’s leman.*’ ” Satisfy me once more ; once more search with me.”

Mrs. Ford now calls down Mrs. Page and the supposed old woman, telling her husband that she is her maid’s aunt. Ford, believing this, declares she is a witch, an “ old cozening quean,” and proceeds :

“ Have I not forbid her my house ? She comes of errands, does she ? . . . Come down, you witch, you hag, you ; come down, I say ! ”

Mrs. Ford pretends to interpose, exclaiming :

“ Nay, good sweet husband—good gentlemen, let him not strike the old woman.”

Falstaff now enters disguised, and led by Mrs. Page, who exclaims to the pretended old woman :

“ Come, Mother Prat, come, give me your hand,”

¹ “ Lover.”—Staunton’s notes.

when Ford exclaims, in passionate, abusive anger :

“I'll *prat* her. Out of my door, you witch [*beats him*], you rag, you baggage, you pole-cat, you ronyon ! Out, out !”

and Falstaff makes off, doubtless as quick as he can.

Though both the merry wives are equally pleased at this scene, yet they think it wiser to reprove Ford for his violence, to keep up appearances, without having the least desire to spare the bodily or mental feelings of Falstaff. Mrs. Page asks, as if in reproof :

“Are you not ashamed? I think you have killed the poor woman,”

while Mrs. Ford, perhaps wishing her husband to be thought severe, says :

“Nay, he will do it.”

Then she scornfully taunts him, saying :

“'Tis a goodly credit for you,”

but Ford, still angry, exclaims :

“Hang her, witch !”

while Evans, though unconsciously, nearly lets the cat out of the bag, by exclaiming, though luckily none notice him :

“By yea and no, I think the 'oman is a witch indeed; I like not when a 'oman has a great peard; I spy a great peard under her muffler.”

Ford again begs all the men to accompany him

in a renewed search through his house. Page good-naturedly agrees, saying to the others :

“Let’s obey his humour a little further ; come, gentlemen.”

The five—Evans, Caius, Page, Shallow, and Ford—then go off to their useless search.

During this amusing, lively scene, it seems remarkable, if not unnatural, that the fiery, excitable French doctor never says a word, yet he is described as entering Ford’s rooms and searching them again with the other seekers. It may be supposed that he occupied the remaining time in making expressive faces at his companions, though not a word escapes him. But it is surely unlikely that this most lively, excitable specimen of a very lively and excitable nation could remain not only inactive, but quite mute, amid a scene that would hardly fail to intensely move and interest him. When alone together the merry wives have a cheerful and amusing chat, as they certainly have every reason to be delighted at the hitherto complete success of their plans and schemes. Mrs. Page exclaims, with more sarcastic satisfaction than charity, alluding to Falstaff’s chastisement by Ford :

“Trust me, he beat him most pitifully,”

and Mrs. Ford merrily rejoins :

“Nay, by the mass, that he did not ; he beat him most unpitifully methought.”

Mrs. Page, apparently the more implacable of the two, proceeds :

“I'll have the cudgel hallowed, and hung ov'r the altar ; it hath done meritorious service.”

Mrs. Ford, evidently so pleased with their success that she wishes to play more tricks on Falstaff, asks :

“What think you ! May we, with the warrant of womanhood and the witness of a good conscience, pursue him with any further revenge ?”

Mrs. Page replies :

“The spirit of wantonness is surely scared out of him,’

and Mrs. Ford asks the important question :

“Shall we tell our husbands how we have served him ?”

Mrs. Page assents :

“Yes, by all means ; if it be but to scrape the figures out of your husband's brains. If they can find in their hearts the poor unvirtuous fat knight shall be any further afflicted, we two will still be the ministers.”

Mrs. Ford replies :

“I'll warrant, they'll have him publicly shamed ; and methinks there would be no period to the jest, should he not be publicly shamed.”

Mrs. Page, eagerly wishing for more amusement with Falstaff, and conceiving a fresh plot against him, wittily rejoins :

“Come to the forge with it, shape it : I would not have things cool.”

They depart, rejoicing equally at their successful trick, and bent on planning another, as hitherto they have alike deceived Falstaff as thoroughly as they could have desired.

The next scene is in the Garter Inn, where Bardolph deceives the lively host, saying that the Germans desire to use three of his horses, adding :

“The Duke himself will be to-morrow at Court and they are going to meet him.”

The host exclaims :

“What Duke should that be, comes so secretly ? I hear not of him in the Court. Let me speak with the gentlemen” ;

and then asks :

“They speak English ?”

Bardolph replies :

“Ay, sir, I'll call them to you,”

while the host, who despite his usual merriment has evidently a keen eye to the main chance, and perhaps rather fears being cheated, exclaims :

“They shall have my horses ; but I'll make them pay, I'll sauce them ; they have had my house a week at command ; I have turned away my other guests ; they must come off ;¹ I'll sauce them. Come,”

and he goes off with Bardolph.

The next scene reverts to Ford's house, where the

¹ “Pay.”—Staunton's notes.

Pages, the Fords, and Evans are together. Ford is at length relieved in his mind; he and Page now know what has really happened; Mrs. Page has shown Falstaff's letter, and Page asks her:

“And did he send you both these letters at an instant?”

Mrs. Page replies:

“Within a quarter of an hour,”

and Ford, now convinced of the truth, says to his gratified wife:

“Pardon me, wife, henceforth do what thou wilt;
I rather will suspect the sun with cold
Than thee with wantonness; now doth thy honour stand,
In him that was of late an heretic,
As firm of faith.”

This eager apology from so hasty a man as Ford makes the more calm and reasonable Page say:

“ ’Tis well, ’tis well; no more:
Be not as extreme in submission
As in offence,
But let our plot go forward: let our wives
Yet once again to make us public sport
Appoint a meeting with this old fat fellow,
Where we may take him and disgrace him for it.”

Ford says, alluding to some previous device:

“There is no better way than that they spoke of,”

but Page exclaims:

“How! to send him word they'll meet him in the park at midnight! fie, fie, he'll never come.”

Evans agrees with Page that Falstaff will not now be so easily deceived, but the merry wives, always allied, are yet, if anything, more eager and astute in devising plots than their husbands are. Accordingly Mrs. Ford says :

“Devise but how you’ll use him when he comes,
And let us two devise to bring him hither.”

Then Mrs. Page proceeds to unfold and fully describe a new project arranged apparently between Mrs. Ford and herself. It is a rather elaborate scheme, almost like a new comedy in itself, and which eventually brings this lively play to a thoroughly happy conclusion : yet so many persons are to take part in it, that in real life its complete success might have been difficult, but in the poet’s hands it succeeds perfectly. Mrs. Page, addressing the three gentlemen and speaking for Mrs. Ford as well as for herself, says :

“There is an old tale goes that Herne the hunter,
Sometime a keeper here in Windsor Forest,
Doth all the winter time at still midnight
Walk round about an oak with great ragg’d horns,
And there he blasts the tree and takes ⁱ the cattle.”

Page, well knowing the old legend, asks :

“Why, yet there want not many that do fear
In deep of night to walk by this Herne’s oak,
But what of this ?”

Mrs. Ford now continues to relate the plot, saying :

ⁱ “Bewitches.”—Staunton’s notes.

“Marry, this is our device,
That Falstaff at that oak shall meet with us,
Disguis'd like Herne with huge horns on his head.”

Page, evidently no match for the two ladies in artful contrivance, asks :

“When you have brought him hither,
What shall be done with him? what is your plot?”

His wife, answering this question, now proceeds to reveal yet more, saying, in evident agreement with Mrs. Ford :

“That likewise have we thought upon, and thus—
Nan Page, my daughter, and my little son,
And three or four more of their growth, we'll dress
Like urchins, ouches¹ and fairies, green and white,
With rounds of waxen tapers on their heads,
And rattles in their hands. Upon a sudden
As Falstaff, she, and I are newly met,
Let them from forth a saw-pit rush at once
With some diffused² song; upon their sight,
We two in great amazedness will fly:
Then let them all encircle him about,
And fairy-like to pinch the unclean knight;
And ask him why that hour of fairy revel
In their so sacred paths he dares to tread
In shape profane.”

Mrs. Ford, as much in the plot as Mrs. Page, eagerly adds :

“And till he tell the truth,
Let the supposed fairies pinch him sound,
And burn him with their tapers.”

Mrs. Page proceeds to a cheerful conclusion :

¹ “Goblins.”—Staunton's notes.

² “Wild.”—Ibid.

“The truth being known,
We'll all present ourselves ; dis-horn the spirit,
And mock him home to Windsor.”

Ford, now at ease again and cordially wishing success to the plot, says in a thoroughly practical, common-sense warning :

“The children must
Be practised well to this, or they'll ne'er do it.”

Sir Hugh Evans, despite his profession as much amused by the idea of the coming pranks as any of his pupils or juniors could be, exclaims in his usual Welsh accent :

“I will teach the children their behaviours ; and I will pe like a jack-an-apes also to purn the knight with my taper.”

Ford, now as delighted as a merry lad at the intended tricks, exultingly exclaims :

“That will be excellent. I'll go buy them vizards,”

and Mrs. Page, thoroughly enjoying all the details of the plot, exclaims with motherly pride :

“My Nan shall be the queen of all the fairies,
Finely attired in a robe of white.”

Page, as if equally proud of their pretty daughter, here exclaims :

“That silk will I go buy” ;

yet, while on good terms with his wife, they differ as

to who their daughter should marry, the father preferring Slender, the mother Dr. Caius, while hitherto both had opposed Miss Page’s welcome lover, young Fenton. Page therefore adds to himself :

“And in that tire
Shall Master Slender steal my Nan away,
And marry her at Eton.”

Then says aloud :

“Go send to Falstaff straight,”

and Ford replies most willingly :

“Nay, I’ll to him again in the name of Brook :
He’ll tell me all his purpose : sure, he’ll come.”

His wife, delighted with this proposition, rejoins :

“Fear not you that, go, get us properties,
And tricking for our fairies.”

Evans, enjoying everything about the plot, more like a lively boy than an elderly parson, in comic merriment adds :

“Let us about it : it is admirable pleasures, and fery honest knaveryes.”

The three gentlemen depart, when Mrs. Page says to Mrs. Ford, as they both trust Mrs. Quickly :

“Go, Mistress Ford,
Send Quickly to Sir John, to know his mind.”

Mrs. Ford departs, and then Mrs. Page alone reveals her private plans and wishes about Anne, saying :

"I'll to the doctor : he hath my good will,
And none but he to marry with Nan Page.
That Slender, though well landed, is an idiot ;
And he my husband best of all affects.
The doctor is well money'd and his friends
Potent at Court : he, none but he, shall have her,
Though twenty thousand worthier come to crave her."

The next scene is at the Garter Inn, where the host and Simple, Slender's servant, enter together. The host, evidently an intelligent, lively man, has little patience with a dull, stupid fellow like Simple. Aware that Simple has a slow or drawling way of speaking, he sharply asks him, with almost comic contempt :

"What wouldst thou have, boor? what, thick-skin? speak, breathe, discuss ; brief, short, quick, snap."

Simple, likely a little frightened, replies :

"Marry, sir, I come to speak with Sir John Falstaff from Master Slender."

The host, who apparently wishes to lose no time with such a dull fellow, replies, showing Falstaff's abode :

"There's his chamber, his house, his castle, his standing-bed,¹
. . . go quick and call."

Simple, catching sight of the supposed fat witch of Brentford, exclaims :

¹ "In the poet's time chambers were usually furnished with a standing bedstead, on which the superior reposéd, and a truckle or running one for the attendant. In the daytime the latter, which was much lower than the standing bed, was wheeled under it, to afford more room in the apartment."—Staunton's notes.

“There’s an old woman, a fat woman, gone up to his chamber ; I’ll be so bold as to stay, sir, till she come down ; I come to speak with her, indeed.”

The host, alarmed, surprised, and quite ignorant of the truth, exclaims :

“Ha ! a fat woman ; the knight may be robbed. I’ll call.—Bully knight ! Bully Sir John, speak from thy lungs military, art thou there ?”

Falstaff asks :

“How now, mine host ?”

and the latter replies, perhaps partly in joke :

“Here’s a Bohemian-Tartar tarries the coming down of thy fat woman—let her descend.”

Then, as if morally shocked or suspicious, he adds :

“My chambers are honourable : fie ! privacy ? fie !”

Falstaff enters, saying the fat old woman was with him but is gone, when Simple explains :

“My master, sir, my master Slender, sent to her, seeing her go through the streets, to know, sir, whether one Nym, sir, that beguiled him of a chain, had the chain or no.”

Simple thus reveals his foolish master’s superstitious ideas about witches and their knowledge, while Falstaff, with consummate effrontery, well knowing his roguish follower Nym and easily deceiving such a silly couple as Slender and Simple, gravely replies :

“I spoke with the old woman about it.”

Simple eagerly asks :

“ And what says she, I pray, sir ? ”

and Falstaff, inventing falsehood after falsehood, being quite master of the situation, answers :

“ Marry, she says that the very same man that beguiled Master Slender of a chain cozened him of it.”

Simple then exclaims :

“ I would I could have spoken with the woman herself; I had other things to have spoken with her too from him.”

Falstaff and the host insist on Simple saying what these things are, and Simple then admits :

“ They were nothing but about Mistress Anne Page; to know if it were my master’s fortune to have her or no.”

Falstaff assures him it is, adding :

“ Go ; say the woman told me so,”

and the poor duped Simple departs, exclaiming :

“ I thank your worship ; I shall make my master glad with these tidings.”

The host then congratulates Falstaff on his cleverness, saying, perhaps with some suspicion :

“ Thou art clerkly, thou art clerkly, Sir John ; was there a wise woman with thee ? ”

Falstaff, ever ready with witty answers, replies :

“Ay, that there was, mine host ; one that hath taught me more wit than ever before I learned in my life,¹ and I paid nothing for it neither, but was paid for my learning.”

At this moment Bardolph enters, telling the poor host that the Germans have run off with his horses :

“Like three German devils, three Dr. Faustuses.”

This brief reference shows that Shakespeare had heard something of the terrible old German legend, which since his time has been so celebrated in translation, music, and poetry. No more allusion to it is made, however, and the host still hopes to recover the horses, exclaiming :

“They are gone but to meet the Duke ; do not say they be fled ! Germans are honest men.”

Evans now enters, confirming Bardolph by exclaiming in warning to the host :

“Have a care of your entertainments ; there is a friend of mine come to town tells me there is three cousin germans that has cozened all the hosts of Reading, of Maidenhead, of Colebrook, of horses and money. I tell you for good-will, look you ; you are wise, and full of gipes and louting stogs, and 'tis not convenient you should be cozened. Fare you well.”

He departs and Dr. Caius enters, both now in turn revenging themselves on the duped host for having formerly ridiculed them. The French doctor asks after the deceived host in his usual excited way :

¹ “He quibbles on the meaning of ‘paid,’ one sense of to *pay* formerly being to *beat*

“Vere is mine *Host de Jarterre*?”

and the host replies, now really alarmed and hardly knowing what to believe,

“Here, master doctor, in perplexity and doubtful dilemma.”

Caius, evidently not having much knowledge of English, answers :

“I cannot tell vat is dat ; but it is tell-a me dat you make great preparation for a Duke *de Jarmany* ; by my trot, dere is no Duke, dat de Court is know to come ; I tell you for good-vill ; adieu !”

and he also departs after imparting this unwelcome news. The poor host, now thoroughly alarmed about losing the horses, goes off with Bardolph, exclaiming :

“Hue and cry, villain, go !”

Then, addressing Falstaff, who makes no reply :

“Assist me, knight ; I am undone, fly, run, hue and cry, villain ! I am undone.”

Falstaff, when alone, says to himself what he probably wishes none to hear. Among other things he alludes to the Court, which was likely often in his mind, owing to his previous intimacy with the wild Prince, who now, though not introduced in this play, is the reigning King, Henry V. Falstaff, apparently absorbed by his own intrigues, can hardly take much interest in the host's troubles, and exclaims rather petulantly :

“I would all the world might be cozened, for I have been cozened and beaten too. If it should come to the ears of the Court, how I have been transformed and how my transformation hath been washed and cudgelled, they would melt me out of my fat, drop by drop, and liquor fishermen’s boots with me ; I warrant they would whip me with their fine wits, till I were as crestfallen as a dried pear. I never prospered since I forswore myself at *primero*.¹ Well, if my wind were but long enough to say my prayers, I would repent.”

At this moment of mental depression enters the indefatigable Mrs. Quickly, saying she comes

“from the two parties forsooth.”

Falstaff, guessing her meaning, yet still deceived, exclaims, as if worn almost out of patience :

“The devil take one party, and his dam the other ! and so they shall be both bestowed ! I have suffered more for their sakes, more than the villainous inconstancy of man’s disposition is able to bear.”

The artful messenger, catching up his words, with all her former cunning and success asks, with pretended sympathy :

“And have not they suffered ? Yes, I warrant ; speciously one of them. Mistress Ford, good heart, is beaten black and blue, that you cannot see a white spot about her.”

This last invention, though ingenious, at first fails, as it only reminds Falstaff of his own experiences, so he exclaims truly and irritably :

¹ “A game of cards so called because the player that can show a particular suit of cards first wins the game.”—Adams’s “Concordance to Shakespeare.”

"What tell'st thou me of black and blue? I was beaten myself into all the colours of the rainbow; and I was like to be apprehended for the witch of Brentford."

Then, his natural vanity coming to his relief, he adds :

"But that my admirable dexterity of wit, my counterfeiting the action of an old woman, delivered me, the knave constable had set me i' the stocks, the common stocks, for a witch."

Mrs. Quickly, who, though doubtless laughing to herself, always plays her part like an admirable actress and is now devoted to the interests and plans of the merry wives, asks, evidently in a most persuasive manner :

"Sir, let me speak with you in your chamber; you shall hear how things go, and I warrant to your content. Here is a letter will say somewhat."

Then, drawing notice to all the trouble she herself is taking, adds :

"Good hearts, what ado here is to bring you together! Sure one of you does not serve heaven well, that you are so crossed."

Falstaff, likely anxious to read the letter, and hitherto no match for Mrs. Quickly in artfulness, asks her to his chamber, and they depart together for private conference, as Mrs. Quickly had proposed.

The next scene is in another room in this hotel between the host and young Fenton. The former's usual high spirits are now greatly lowered, and he is hardly inclined to speak. He therefore exclaims :

“Master Fenton, talk not to me, my mind is heavy; I will give over all.”

Fenton, however, now tries successfully to raise his dejected spirits by promises of reward, as well as by amusing intelligence, and replies :

“ Yet hear me speak ; assist me in my purpose,
And as I am a gentleman I'll give thee
A hundred pounds in gold more than your loss.”

The relieved host then replies :

“ I will hear you, Master Fenton : and I will at the least keep your counsel.”

Fenton, who bribes both Mrs. Quickly and the host to assist him in courting Miss Page, shows the host a letter from her, and finally reveals the third and last plot against old Falstaff, which Anne's letter evidently relates. Fenton now explains the whole contemplated scene to the host with all the spirit and interest of a lively young man, and not only somewhat restores the depressed host to his usual spirits, but persuades him to aid in the coming sport of which Falstaff, though only to a harmless extent, is to be the victim, while both Caius and Slender are to be the dupes. The object of the whole scheme, though not fully known to either the Pages or the Fords, is to effect Fenton's marriage with Anne Page, yet in this ultimate design Anne's parents, while organising this sport, are to be mystified or taken in. Fenton explains the whole plan to the listening host, who enjoys what he thinks the coming fun as much as Fenton

could wish. After showing the host Anne's letter, Fenton proceeds :

“ Hark, good mine host,
 To-night at Herne's oak, just 'twixt twelve and one,
 Must my sweet Nan present the fairy queen ;
 The purpose why is here : in which disguise,
 While other jests are something rank on foot,
 Her father hath commanded her to slip
 Away with Slender, and with him at Eton
 Immediately to marry ; she hath consented.
 Now, sir. Her mother, even¹ strong against that match,
 And firm for Dr. Caius, hath appointed
 That he shall likewise shuffle her away,
 While other sports are tasking of their minds,
 And at the deanery, where a priest attends,
 Straight marry her ; to this her mother's plot
 She, seemingly obedient, likewise hath
 Made promise to the doctor :—Now thus it rests :
 Her father means she shall be all in white ;
 And in that habit, when Slender sees his time
 To take her by the hand and bid her go,
 She shall go with him—her mother hath intended,
 The better to denote her to the doctor,
 (For they must be all masked and vizarded),
 That quaint in green she shall be loose enrob'd,
 And with ribands pendant flaring 'bout her head ;
 And when the doctor spies his vantage ripe,
 To pinch her by the hand, and on that token,
 The maid hath given consent to go with him.”

The listening, friendly host, yet apparently rather confused at these elaborate preparations, asks plainly :

“ Which means she to deceive ? father or mother ? ”

and the expectant bridegroom replies decisively :

“ Both, my good host, to go along with me.
 And here it rests,—that you'll procure the vicar

¹ “Equally.”—Staunton's notes.

To stay for me at church, 'twixt twelve and one,
And in the lawful name of marrying,
To give our hearts united ceremony.”

The good-humoured host, quite friendly, yet not perhaps altogether disinterested, cordially rejoins, just as Fenton desires :

“Well, husband your device ; I'll to the vicar ;
Bring you the maid, you shall not lack a priest.”

Fenton, rejoiced at his success with the host and eagerly longing for the future event, exclaims in a grateful, yet thoroughly practical manner :

“So shall I ever more be bound to thee ;
Besides, I'll make a present recompense.”

The amount of this present bribe is not again stated, but it may be the “hundred pounds in gold” already stated ; it is likely satisfactory, however, as the host without another word departs with his eager, spirited young friend.¹ Thus, Fenton, though so young a man, has cleverly succeeded in having Mrs. Quickly and the host alike in his pay, for each is anxious to further his plans and wishes.

The next and last act begins in the Garter Inn, where enter Falstaff and Mrs. Quickly. This active lady, Falstaff's “good she-Mercury,” is throughout

¹ Mr. Furnivall writes of this obliging host: “He helps the young lovers, Fenton and Anne. There's a touch of poetry in his nature ; he's evidently, too, the centre of sociability in his town, as country innkeepers so often are.”—Preface to the “Royal Shakespeare.”

quite his overmatch, and deceives him completely in one scene after another. Her last private conversation with him has again quite convinced him of her friendly sincerity, though he is evidently tired of her voluble talk, as he says :

“Prythee, no more prattling—go—I’ll hold: this is the third time; I hope good luck lies in odd numbers. Away, go; they say there is divinity in odd numbers. . . . Away.”

Mrs. Quickly, ever ready and businesslike, makes no remarks about the idea of odd numbers, but, quite devoted to the secret plot she has on hand, replies :

“I’ll provide you a chain, and I’ll do what I can to get you a pair of horns.”

As she seems to linger, probably laughing to herself, Falstaff for the fourth time tells her to be off, adding :

“Time wears, hold up your head and mince.”¹

She departs, perhaps looking particularly meek and decorous, and Ford enters, still disguised as Mr. Brook, and Falstaff immediately asks him to come to Herne’s oak² about midnight, adding :

“And you shall see wonders.”

¹ Mince, “walk with affected modesty.”—Staunton’s notes.

² “The old tradition was that Herne, one of the keepers in the park, having committed an offence for which he feared to be disgraced, hung himself upon an oak, which was ever after haunted by his ghost.”—Staunton’s notes.

Ford, no longer deceived, yet fated to hear more amusing intelligence, asks :

“Went you not to her yesterday, sir, as you told me you had appointed?”

In reply, Falstaff makes an interesting revelation of his proceedings, with his usual careful and ever witty particularity :

“I went to her, Master Brook, as you see, like a poor old man, but I came from her, Master Brook, like a poor old woman.”

Then, never suspecting whom he is addressing, he proceeds, as interested in relating as Ford is in listening :

“This same knave Ford, her husband, hath the finest mad devil of jealousy in him, Master Brook, that ever governed frenzy: I will tell you.”

And the deceived and yet deceiving old rogue continues, trying to vindicate his personal bravery, though under sadly discouraging circumstances :

“He beat me grievously in the shape of a woman, for in the shape of man, Master Brook, I fear not Goliath with a weaver’s beam; because I know also that life is a shuttle. I am in haste, go along with me; I’ll tell you all, Master Brook.”

Then sudden remembrance of a likely mischievous boyhood flashing across his excited mind, he adds, perhaps truly enough :

“Since I plucked geese, played truant and whipped top, I knew not what it was to be beaten till lately.”

He continues, probably amusing Ford instead of provoking him as before by his confidential revelations :

"Follow me, I'll tell you strange things of this knave Ford, on whom to-night I will be revenged, and I will deliver his wife into your hand. Follow; strange things in hand, Master Brook; follow."

Not a word does Ford answer, but goes off with Falstaff, doubtless in a highly interested, excited state of mind, which he never reveals.

The next scene is in Windsor Park, where Page, Shallow, and Slender are together. Both the elder gentlemen evidently enjoy the thoughts of the coming frolic quite as much as do any of the younger people. Page exclaims to the other two :

"Come, come, we'll couch i' the castle ditch, till we see the light of our fairies."

Then, anxious to have Slender for his son-in-law, adds :

"Remember, son Slender, my daughter."

Slender, foolish as ever and as completely deceived as Page is by Anne, simply replies :

"Ay, forsooth: I have spoke with her and we have a nay word¹ how to know one another; I come to her in white and say '*Mum*,' she cries '*Budget*,' and by that we know one another."

Old Shallow likes this plan, and, eager for his

¹ "A watchword."—Staunton's notes.

cousin Slender to marry Anne with as little trouble as possible, exclaims :

“That’s good too, but what needs either your ‘*Mum*’ or her ‘*Budget*’? The white will decipher her well enough.”

Slender says no more, and Shallow adds, evidently eager for the sport :

“It hath struck ten o’clock.”

Page, as anxious as Shallow is for Slender to marry his daughter, eagerly exclaims, but in high spirits :

“The night is dark ; light and spirits will become it well. Heaven prosper our sport !”

Then, grimly alluding to Falstaff, adds :

“No man means evil but the devil, and we shall know him by his horns. Let’s away, follow me,”

and the three depart together, all united in hopes and plans, despite their differing characters.

The next scene is in a street at Windsor, where enter the “merry wives” and Dr. Caius. Mrs. Page, as anxious for Anne to marry Caius as Page is for Slender to marry her, then instructs the French doctor what to do when they all meet in Windsor Park. She says :

“My daughter is in green ; when you see your time, take her by her hand, away with her to the deanery ; and despatch it quickly. Go before into the park ; we two”—

meaning Mrs. Ford and herself—

“must go together.”

Caius, doubtless delighted and expectant, replies confidently :

“I know vat I have to do. Adieu,”

and he departs, when Mrs. Page owns to Mrs. Ford :

“My husband will not rejoice so much at the abuse of Falstaff, as he will chafe at the doctor’s marrying my daughter.”

Then, evidently never in awe of her easygoing consort, she adds :

“But ’tis no matter; better a little chiding, than a great deal of heart-break.”

From these words Mrs. Page apparently thinks that Anne at least prefers Caius to “yond fool,” as she had called Slender, while Miss Page herself seems to dislike both equally, and really loves the comparatively handsome and gentleman-like Mr. Fenton. Mrs. Ford, evidently looking forward with pleasure to the coming sport, then asks :

“Where is Nan now, and her troop of fairies? And the Welsh devil, Hugh?”

meaning Evans, who is disguised with them. Mrs. Page, who understands all the intended plot, except indeed Anne’s contemplated elopement with Fenton, replies :

“They are all couched in a pit hard by Herne’s oak, with obscured lights, which the very instant of Falstaff’s coming and our meeting, they will at once display to the night.”

Mrs. Page and Mrs. Ford, after again expressing delight at the plot, depart together, Mrs. Ford merrily exclaiming :

“The hour draws on, to the oak, to the oak.”

The next scene is in Windsor Park, which Evans enters, accompanied by the pretended fairies and he directs them in his usual Welsh accent, with which Shakespeare seems thoroughly acquainted :

“Trib, trib, fairies, come and remember your parts. Be pold I pray you; follow me into the pit, and when I give the watch-’ords do as I pid you. Come, comé, trib, trib.”

They vanish, while Falstaff, alone, enters another part of the park, also disguised, and with a buck’s head on. He utters a remarkable soliloquy, having still no idea of the tricks that are being played upon him, and invokes Jupiter with something of the knowledge, if not the taste, of a classical scholar. This love or knowledge of classic literature Shakespeare freely attributes not only to Falstaff, likely a comparatively educated man, but even to his coarse, disorderly followers. In his present excited or vainglorious state of mind the traditional amours of the pagan deities transmitted in classic poetry recur to Falstaff’s extraordinary mind as he exclaims, with apparent earnestness :

"The Windsor bell hath struck twelve; the minute draws on: now the hot-blooded gods assist me. Remember, Jove, thou wast a bull for thy Europa;¹ love set on thy horns. O powerful love! that in some respects makes a beast of man; in some other, a man a beast; you were also, Jupiter, a swan for the love of Leda.² O omnipotent love! how near the god drew to the complexion of a goose! . . . For me, I am here a Windsor stag, and the fattest, I think, in the forest . . . Who comes here? my doe?"

Here enter the merry wives; and Mrs. Ford, who with Falstaff is in a park full of wild deer, they call each other so, with about equal sincerity. She exclaims, as if delighted to meet him:

"Sir John; art thou there, my deer, my male deer?"

and he replies in the same style:

"My doe,"

and then in a joyful exclamation mentions potatoes, great rarities in Shakespeare's time and in that of Falstaff unknown. His naming them, therefore,

¹ "A daughter of Agenor, King of Phœnicia. She was so beautiful that Jupiter became enamoured of her, and he assumed the shape of a bull . . . Europa caressed the beautiful animal, and at last had the courage to sit upon his back . . . Some suppose that Europa lived about 1552 years before the Christian era."—Lemprière's Classical Dictionary.

² "A daughter of King Thespius and Eurythemis, who married Tyndarus, King of Sparta. She was seen bathing in the river Eurotas by Jupiter, and the god, struck with her beauty, resolved to deceive her. He persuaded Venus to change herself into an eagle, while he assumed the form of a swan . . . Jupiter, as if fearful of the tyrannical cruelty of the bird of prey, fled through the air into the arms of Leda, who willingly sheltered the trembling swan from the assaults of his superior enemy."—Ibid.

was likely to highly amuse a London audience of the poet's period. He exclaims in very short-lived exultation :

“Let the sky rain potatoes, let it thunder to the tune of Green-sleeves ; hail-kissing comfits and snow eringoes,¹ let there come a tempest of provocation, I will shelter me here” [*embracing her*].

Mrs. Ford exclaims :

“Mrs. Page is come with me, sweetheart” ;

and Falstaff rejoins, nothing abashed, and thinking himself happy at last :

“Divide me like a bri'b'd buck, each a haunch . . . Am I a woodman? Ha! Speak I like Herne the hunter?”

Confident in his success with the two ladies, Falstaff in his joy again reverts to classic lore, this time to the boy-god of Love :

“Why now is Cupid a child of conscience : he makes restitution. As I am a true spirit, welcome !”

His pleasure is of brief duration ; a noise is heard, of what kind it is not said, at which expected signal the two wives, as if panic-stricken, run off, leaving Falstaff amazed and alone. He exclaims in utter perplexity, if not desperation, that the Evil Spirit himself is now crossing him, when Evans enters disguised as a satyr with the redoubtable Mrs. Quickly and Pistol, once Falstaff's follower, but now apparently

¹ Bonbons—sugar-plums.

aiding to deceive his former patron. Since Falstaff had declared he

"would not lend him a penny,"

and he replied that he would

"open the world with his sword like an oyster,"

this fellow had evidently deserted Falstaff, while his comrades, Nym and Bardolph, seem to take no part in the tricks practised on their former chief. Anne Page also now appears as the fairy queen, with her brother and other children attired like fairies, having waxen tapers on their heads. Miss Page, acting the fairy queen on this occasion, tries to resemble Titania in addressing her attendants :

" Fairies, black and grey, green and white,
 You moonshine revellers and shades of night,
 You orphan-heirs of fixed destiny,
 Attend your office and your quality.
 Crier Hobgoblin, make the fairy Oyes."

She gives this last direction to Pistol, who doubtless changes his well-known name not to be recognised by the listening Falstaff, and says :

" Elves, list your names ; silence, you airy toys.
 Cricket, to Windsor chimneys shalt thou leap ;
 Where fires thou find'st unrak'd and hearths unswept,
 There pinch the maids as blue as bilberry :
 Our radiant queen hates sluts and sluttery."

Pistol's words, tending to confirm Falstaff's vague notions of fairy ideas and tricks, make him now

believe that actual fairies are around him, and he exclaims to himself, while lying on his face :

“ They are fairies ; he that speaks to them shall die ;
I'll wink and couch : no man their works must eye.”

Evans and Anne now give different directions to their juvenile followers. The former says :

“ Go you and where you find a maid,
That ere she sleep, has thrice her prayers said,
Raise up the organs of her fantasy,
Sleep she as sound as careless infancy :
But those that sleep and think not on their sins,
Pinch them, arms, legs, backs, shoulders, sides, and shins.”

Anne Page, imitating the style or authority of the real fairy queen Titania, thus addresses those around her :

“ About, about !
Search Windsor Castle, elves, within and out ;
Strew good luck, ouches, on every sacred room ;
That it may stand till the perpetual doom
In state as wholesome as in state 'tis fit ;
Worthy the owner, and the owner it.
The several chairs of order look you scour
With juice of balm and every precious flower :
Each fair instalment, coat and several crest,
With loyal blazon evermore be blest !”

Shakespeare's firm attachment to the English monarchy, and evident respect for its beautiful seat at Windsor Castle, animate this pretended fairy queen's speech. Its spirit much resembles the address of the real fairy king, Oberon, to his attendant fairies when devoting blessings and good wishes

to the Greek Duke Theseus in his palace at Athens.¹ Miss Page proceeds, having apparently well learned her part :

“ And nightly, meadow fairies, look you sing,
Like to the Garter’s compass in a ring.
The expressure that it bears, green let it be,
More fertile-fresh than all the field to see ;
And, *Honi soit qui mal y pense*,² write,
In emerald tufts, flowers purple, blue and white,
Like sapphire, pearl, and rich embroidery,
Buckled below fair knighthood’s bending knee :
Fairies use flowers for their chartery.”

Then, reverting practically to their present frolic, she concludes :

“ Away, disperse, but till ’tis one o’clock
Our dance of custom round about the oak
Of Herne the hunter, let us not forget.”

Evans, as if at least partly master of the revels, now addresses all, and in his usual Welsh accent :

“ Pray you, lock hand in hand ; yourselves in order set ;
And twenty glow-worms shall our lanterns pe
To guide our measures round about the tree.
Put stay ; I smell a man of middle earth.”

He means Falstaff, who, in the midst of his dismay

¹ “ With this field-dew consecrate,
Every fairy take his gait ;
And each several chamber bless,
Through this palace with sweet peace,
And the owner of it blest,
Ever shall in safety rest.”

—“ Midsummer Night’s Dream,” Act V., Scene 2.

² “ Evil be to him who evil thinks.”

and bewilderment, detects the Welsh accent, though apparently not the man, and exclaims in sincere though comic alarm :

“Heavens defend me from that Welsh fairy ! lest he transform me to a piece of cheese !”

Pistol now scornfully addresses Falstaff, who apparently does not yet recognise him :

“Vile worm, thou wast o'erlook'd¹ even in thy birth,”

while the pretended queen proceeds, addressing her attendants, as all now see Falstaff lying prostrate before them :

“With trial-fire touch me his finger end,
If he be chaste the flame will back descend,
And turn him to no pain ; but if he start,
It is the flesh of a corrupted heart.”

Pistol, as if rather enjoying the fun of teasing his former perhaps tyrannical old patron, exclaims eagerly :

“A trial, come.”

Evans adding :

“Come, will this wood take fire ?”

and they touch Falstaff's fingers, who naturally screams out :

“Oh, oh, oh !”

¹ “ Bewitched.”—Staunton's notes.

while Anne Page, persisting in her fairy queen pretensions, directs her attendant fairies with as much authority as Titania. Hearing yet without compassion Falstaff's shouts when feeling the fire, she exclaims, as if convinced of his guilt :

“Corrupt, corrupt and tainted in desire !
About him, fairies ; sing a scornful rhyme,
And, as you trip, still pinch him to your time.”

Her obedient, willing young subjects then sing in chorus, likely with great delight, while Falstaff lies terrified and helpless before them :

“Fie on sinful fantasy !
Fie on lust and luxury !

Pinch him, fairies, mutually,
Pinch him for his villainy ;
Pinch him and burn him, and turn him about,
Till candles and starlight and moonshine be out.”

While the pretended fairies are singing and pinching Falstaff, the plot as previously revealed by Fenton to the host is carefully carried out. Dr. Caius steals away a disguised male fairy, while Slender bears off a similar one, each of the deceived suitors thinking he has Anne Page ; while Fenton elopes with her. “A noise of hunting” is heard, the fairies run off, while Falstaff, pulling off his buck's head and horns, rises, and immediately is seized by the “merry wives” and by their two husbands. Page exclaims :

“Nay, do not fly, I think we have watch'd¹ you now,
Will none but Herne the hunter serve your turn ?”

¹ “Tamed.”—Staunton's notes.

and his wife says :

“I pray you come ; hold up the jest no higher.”

Then, addressing the old half-stupefied knight, she tauntingly asks :

“Now, good Sir John, how like you Windsor wives ?”

Then, alluding to the buck’s head and horns which Falstaff has just pulled off, says :

“See you these, husband ? do not these fair yokes,
Become the forest better than the town ?”

Falstaff makes no reply, perhaps cannot, while the triumphant Ford, no longer jealous, now ridicules him by sarcastically recalling his defeat and disappointments :

“Now, sir ? *Master Brook*, Falstaff’s a knave. . . . and, *Master Brook*, he hath enjoyed nothing of Ford’s but his buck-basket, his cudgel, and twenty pounds of money which must be paid to *Master Brook* ; his horses are arrested for it, *Master Brook*.”

Mrs. Ford adds with pretended sympathy, while also jeering at the old dupe :

“Sir John, we have had ill-luck ; we could never meet. I will never take you for my love again, but I will always count you my deer.”

Falstaff, conscience-struck, overcome by so many crosses, and quite confounded yet perhaps not really frightened, can only exclaim in sincerity and few words :

“I do begin to perceive that I am made an ass,”

and then proceeds, gradually understanding more and more of what has happened :

“ And these are not fairies ? I was three or four times in the thought they were not fairies, and yet the guiltiness of my mind, the sudden surprise of my powers, drove the grossness of the foppery into a received belief, in despite of the teeth of all rhyme and reason that they were fairies.”

He then makes a short moral reflection, too late for his own guidance :

“ See now how wit may be made a Jack-a-lent, when it is upon ill employment !”

The worthy parson Evans, hearing these words and thinking this the right moment to give the baffled old sinner advice, says admonishingly :

“ Sir John Falstaff, serve Got, and leave your desires, and the fairies will not pinse you.”

Ford, at last in thorough good-humour, and perhaps amused at Evans’s disguise, rejoins approvingly :

“ Well said, fairy Hugh,”

and Evans, thinking it a good moment to lecture Ford, continues :

“ And leave your jealousies too, I pray you.”

Ford, who like Falstaff evidently dislikes the Welsh accent of his adviser, declares :

“ I will never mistrust my wife again, till thou art able to woo her in good English.”

Falstaff, slowly recalling his scattered wits, begins to deplore and wonder at his strange humiliation, asking himself :

“Have I laid my brain in the sun and dried it, that it wants matter to prevent so gross o'er-reaching as this? Am I ridden with a Welsh goat too? Shall I have a coxcomb of frieze! ¹ 'tis time I were choked with a piece of toasted cheese.”

Evans, who perhaps hardly knows or cannot overcome his strong accent, rejoins :

“Seese is not goot to give putter; your pelly is all putter.”

Falstaff, despite his present depression, retains enough of his old spirit to again ridicule Evans's accent, repeating in almost comic contempt or disgust :

“*Seese and putter!* Have I lived to stand at the taunt of one that makes fritters of English? This is enough to be the decay of lust and late-walking through the realm.”

Mrs. Page, perhaps provoked at his coolness, thinks it time to express her thorough contempt for him, asking :

“Why, Sir John, do you think that we would have thrust virtue out of our hearts by the head and shoulders, . . . that ever the devil could have made you our delight?”

The whole five—the two wives, Page, Ford, and Evans—now join in abusing and ridiculing the deceived old knight in turn, and he hears all without reply. Ford heads them in uttering a rather gross personal allusion :

¹ “A fool's cap made of frieze; Wales was celebrated for this description of cloth.”—Staunton's notes.

“ What, a hodge-pudding ? a bag of flax ?

MRS. PAGE. A puffed man ?

PAGE. Old, cold, withered.

FORD. And one that is as slanderous as Satan.

PAGE. And as poor as Job.

FORD. And as wicked as his wife.”

Evans concludes, carefully summing up most of Falstaff's personal habits and failings :

“ And given to taverns, and sack and wine and metheglins,¹ and to drinkings, and swearings, and starings, pribbles and prabbles ! ”

Falstaff, probably wearied and physically overcome by all he has endured, exclaims submissively, yet still with a faint attempt at a sarcasm about the Welshman Evans :

“ Well, I am your theme : you have the start of me ; I am dejected ; I am not able to answer the Welsh flannel ; . . . use me as you will.”

Ford replies now in exulting joke, yet neither vindictively nor really dangerously :

“ Marry, sir, we'll bring you to Windsor ; to one Master Brook, that you have cozened of money, to whom you should have been a pander ; over and above that you have suffered, I think, to repay that money will be a biting affliction.”

Page, always comparatively good-natured, adds :

“ Yet be cheerful, knight ; thou shalt eat a posset² to-night at my house, where I will desire thee to laugh at my wife, that now laughs at thee.”

¹ Mead.

² “ Curds, or curdled milk.”—Staunton's notes.

Then, as if wishing to rather alarm Mrs. Page, he adds :

“Tell her Master Slender hath married her daughter.”

Mrs. Page, hoping and thinking otherwise, here says to herself :

“Doctors doubt that: if Anne Page be my daughter, she is by this Dr. Caius’s wife.”

At this moment the deceived silly Slender enters in troubled confusion, addressing his would-be father-in-law :

“Whoo! ho! ho! father Page.”

Page, hoping he is married, replies :

“How now, son? Have you despatched?”

But Slender replies :

“Despatched! I’ll make the best in Gloucestershire know on’t; would I were hanged else!”

Page asks :

“Of what, son?”

and the disappointed suitor continues :

“I came yonder at Eton to marry Mistress Anne Page, and she’s a great lubberly boy; if it had not been in the church, I would have swinged him, or he should have swinged me. If I did not think it had been Anne Page, would I might never stir!—and ‘tis a postmaster’s boy.”

Page, as surprised and disappointed as Slender, exclaims :

“ Why, this is your own folly. Did I not tell you how you should know my daughter by her garments ? ”

The luckless Slender can only reply in his simple way :

“ I went to her in white and cried ‘ *Mum*, ’ and she cried ‘ *Budget*, ’ as Anne and I had appointed, and yet it was not Anne, but a postmaster’s boy.”

Mrs. Page, knowing her husband is in good-humour, owing to the amusement of the previous scene, now thinks she can enlighten him, little guessing that she is as much mistaken as he is, and exclaims :

“ Good George, be not angry ; I knew of your purpose, turned my daughter into green, and indeed she is now with the doctor at the deanery and there married.”

But at this very moment enters Dr. Caius equally disappointed, yet far more angry, vehemently asking :

“ Vere is Mistress Page ? By gar, I am cozened ; I ha’ married *un garçon* a boy ; *un paisan*, by gar, a boy ; it is not Anne Page ; by gar, I am cozened.”

Mrs. Page, now as disappointed as her husband, asks :

“ Why, did you take her in green ? ”

and Caius with his usual vehemence answers :

“Ay, be gar, and 'tis a boy ; be gar, I'll raise all Windsor,”

and off he goes accordingly, though more likely to “raise Windsor” to laugh than to aid or pity him. Ford, who probably has been too much engrossed by his late jealousy to attend much to other people's affairs, asks in surprise :

“This is strange ; who hath got the right Anne ?”

Page guesses the truth, exclaiming :

“My mind misgives me. Here comes Master Fenton.”

and at this opportune moment the successful lover enters with Anne, who asks pardon of both parents, while they in turn ask her why she had not accepted Slender or Dr. Caius, and Fenton now answers for his bride in eloquent language :

“You do amaze¹ her : hear the truth of it.
You would have married her most shamefully,
Where there was no proportion held in love.
The truth is, she and I, long since contracted,
Are now so sure that nothing can dissolve us.”

Fenton proceeds in the poet's grand language to defend both himself and Anne for their secret marriage, and his moral eloquence finally reconciles the Pages to what has been done and cannot be undone. It seems uncertain if Falstaff and Fenton are acquainted, as they never address one another in the play. Yet both had only been too familiar with the wild Prince of former days, and therefore probably knew each other.

¹ Confound.”—Staunton's notes.

Fenton, proudly vindicating his bride and their private wedding, openly declares to his hitherto disapproving father and mother-in-law :

“The offence is holy that she hath committed,
And this deceit loses the name of craft,
Of disobedience, or unduteous title,
Since therein she doth evitate and shun
A thousand irreligious cursed hours,
Which forced marriage would have brought upon her.”

Ford, now in thorough good-humour with everybody, desiring a general agreement and forgiveness all round, takes the part of the young couple, and addressing the surprised parents, exclaims :

“Stand not amaz’d, here is no remedy—
In love the heavens themselves do guide the state,
Money buys lands and wives are sold by fate.”

Falstaff, in whose extraordinary character a general good-nature is usually prevalent, exclaims to all around :

“I am glad, though you have ta’en a special stand to strike at me,
that your arrow hath glanced.”

Page, always good-humoured and willing to make the best of things, exclaims, though evidently more resigned than cheerful :

“Well, what remedy? Fenton, Heaven give thee joy!
What cannot be eschew’d, must be embraced.”

Falstaff, perhaps trying to divert his bewildered mind from his late defeats, exclaims, as if addressing no one in particular :

“When night-dogs run, all sorts of deer are chas’d,”

while Mrs. Page, in thorough good-humour with herself and all around, chiefly caused by the success of her joint plots with Mrs. Ford against Falstaff, now addresses all present in a thoroughly pacific, friendly spirit :

“Well, I will muse no further—Master Fenton,
Heaven give you many, many merry days !
Good husband, let us every one go home,
And laugh this sport over by a country fire.”

Then she includes among her guests the one who, perhaps, scarcely expected an invitation, by adding :

“Sir John and all.”

Ford, in a like spirit, assents by exclaiming :

“Let it be so.”

and apparently Falstaff agrees, or is made to accompany them. Thus ends this merry, playful comedy, which, however, terminates rather abruptly. While the merry wives, their relieved husbands, and the newly-married couple may enjoy a happy evening, old Falstaff has really nothing to fear now except a few sarcastic jokes at his expense. But Justice Shallow and the disappointed suitors, Caius and Slender, will be doubtless expressing their disappointment in many an amusing or vehement speech which Shakespeare withholds. It is remarkable that Falstaff should have so completely dismissed, or acted without, his former

followers, Bardolph, Nym, and Pistol, during his recent baffled intrigues. He exclusively relied throughout on his own shrewdness or knowledge of character, neither proving so profound or trustworthy as he imagined, when encountering the combined art, skill, and address of Mrs. Page, Mrs. Ford, and their astute subordinate, Mrs. Quickly. He is therefore completely deceived, foiled, and in every way outwitted by such a redoubtable trio. Whether he subsequently recalls his discarded or distrusted followers to his service, or how they pursue their fortunes without him, is never told or hinted at. Yet the effect of this brilliant play is most cheerful and amusing to attentive readers by its wit and liveliness. Its success on the London stage recently would surely have gone far to satisfy its great author himself, by the pleasure it gave and the interest it inspired.

This thoroughly gay play leaves its personages on the whole pretty much as it found them, except for Fenton's private marriage with Miss Page. Falstaff's artful tricks have recoiled completely on himself. No one is injured or even much annoyed by them, and even he incurs no new danger, nor has he made a single implacable enemy. His money difficulties, however, will likely increase, while his three former followers, the

“young ravens,”

according to their own description, “must have food,” yet how Falstaff, so baffled and detected, will ever be able to manage his and their finances

again is left doubtful. His strange, original character, which of all the amusing inventions of English fiction has been among the most popular, is consistently as well as comically sustained throughout this lively comedy. To present him again witty and jovial was perhaps the poet's great object after previously mentioning his sudden and almost cruel disgrace at the end of “King Henry IV.,” and vaguely intimating his death in “King Henry V.” In this merry play Falstaff in wit and spirit is himself again.

There are no other characters in it of very much interest. The Pages, Fords, Shallow, Slender, Caius, and Mrs. Quickly, possess little attraction in themselves. It is Falstaff who inspires them with a wit, or elicits from them an intelligence, which they rarely, if ever, display without him. Whenever he appears he arouses interest and amusement, well justifying his opinion of himself, long previously expressed:

“I am not only witty in myself, but the cause that wit is in other men.”¹

¹ “Second Part of Henry IV.,” Act I, Scene 2.

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